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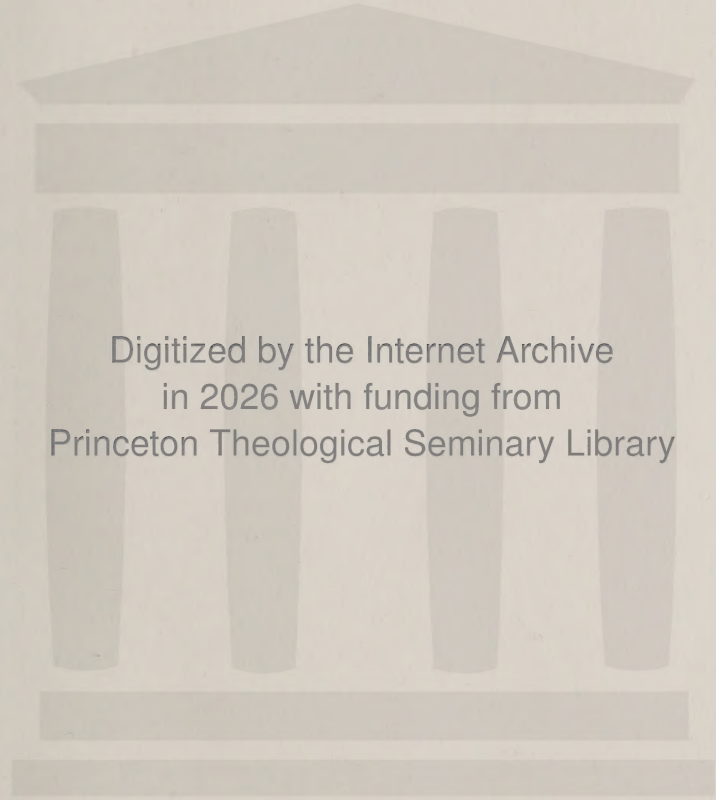
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THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

By
WELLMAN J. WARNER, PH.D.

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TO
L. T. HOBHOUSE

PREFACE

THE direct social effects of the churches have become more difficult to trace than formerly. The rôle of religion, as an organized discipline, has dwindled, as the social functions it once performed have been secularized. Students of sociology and social history, however, have described the striking contributions of earlier religious groups in laying the foundations of industrial society. Max Weber's *Religionssoziologie* (shortly to be had in English translation) has continued to be a seminal study, and Mr Tawney's essay has more recently brought into focus the fascinating process of religion working on the English culture of the seventeenth century to produce the economic mentality.

The present volume is an attempt to observe a similar process in a later but well-defined period. Any inquiry into social psychology is, of course, an elusive project. In the present instance it seemed best to make a study of the bearing of the Wesleyan movement upon the creation of a social mentality, in the form of a detailed analysis with contemporary documentation. That method has, therefore, been followed.

The invariable courtesy and tireless co-operation of the staff of the British Museum Reading Room is, of course, a tradition, but one which cannot fail to arouse in the researcher a fresh appreciation. The officers of Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, U.S.A., also made the excellent Wesleyan material in its library available. Its large and valuable group of as yet unclassified eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pamphlets, originally collected

by Luke Tyerman, is a mine of obvious value to the student of English social history.

Professor H. J. Laski graciously undertook to read the work in proof. His valuable criticisms, however, constitute but a small part of my obligation to him.

I am grateful for the friendly interest of Mr J. L. Hammond, and for his encouragement in carrying through the manuscript to publication. Professor J. H. Park, of New York University, kindly read the manuscript and made critical suggestions. I am indebted to Mr R. H. Tawney, both for stimulus and advice in promoting the study; to Rev. T. E. Brigden, one of the editors of the *Wesley Historical Society's Proceedings*, for valuable suggestions; to A. M. Keenleyside, for sympathetic criticism; and to Professor D. C. Macintosh, of Yale University, for inspiration and ever-gracious interest.

The book was dedicated before the death of Professor Hobhouse. Originally the study grew out of discussions with him on a related subject. It would be futile for one even to try to detail one's debt to such a master and friend.

W. J. W.

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A. INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL VALUES AND THE COMMON MAN, 1688-1790

THE age of the Revolution delivered to eighteenth-century England both a threat and a promise. A menace of chaos at many points, however, failed to weaken the elements of a solution to one basic problem. Religious loyalties, aroused by the pressure of events, had focussed attention upon the nature of political authority. The result was to prove the germinal preface to a new political system. In the eyes of contemporaries, however, the outcome of 1688 was an escape from a single overshadowing danger, by a solution which involved no threat to the integrity of the existing social structure. In fact, a reappraisal of the grounds of social relationships had become urgent, but that necessity remained a problem, not only unsolved but undiscovered.

There followed in the eighteenth century a process in which the individual emerged as superior to any external labels and as the unit of political calculation. The community shifted the basis of its estimate of the citizen from impersonal to personal grounds. This was, broadly, the humanitarian movement of that period. It was a many-sided process which cannot be equated merely to the development of certain political ideas. It was that and much more. It included the action of all those converging forces which destroyed earlier standards, initiated new social values, and produced appropriate social forms to embody a new system. Several pertinent questions give

perspective to that sociological process: What was the nature of the social outlook dominant at the outset of the eighteenth century? What was necessary to break the grip of that entrenched scale of values? What factors moved to create a new status for the individual?

It cannot be doubted that there existed in the English tradition the foundations of the liberal attitude. A Christian tradition and historical experience both carried the seeds of that view which ranked the values of personality first in the organized community. On the threshold of the eighteenth century, however, those seeds were sterilized by the surrounding situation. Obviously, a rigid class tradition and the defensive impulses of vested selfishness worked to fix the existing stratification of English society. Yet the vitality of the illiberal impulses issued from no conservative philosophy. The inertia of the existing system perpetuated itself. The selfishness of the possessing classes and the conservative mood conspired with the very material organization of the community.

The character of those forces which guaranteed the persistence of the traditional mind is clear. Economic conditions rendered a large section of the community impotent. No accurate record exists to measure the size of the group, but that it was terrifyingly large was indisputable. Economists at the end of the seventeenth century like Petty and Gregory King gave it as their considered estimate that more than half of the entire population were a liability on the nation. The constant absorption of the authorities, both local and central, with the problem of poor-rate burdens testifies to an ever-present throng of the distressed. The typical judgment of the day blamed the unfortunate for their own condition. Even the least prejudiced of contemporaries, like the

Quaker John Bellers, were convinced that the only relief practicable was a palliative which would modify the rigour of distress without burdening the community. The most sanguine did not dream of any fundamental alteration in affairs. Proposals for relief included projects for promoting charity schools, schools of industry, co-operative industrial communities, and other expedients, completely unaware of the possibility of a radical cure. The magnitude of the class in need and the problem of relief appalled both those whose benevolence prompted them to seek means of relieving the most acute distress and those whose purses felt the strain of public levies. It is not necessary here to inquire how novel this condition was. It is clear that the loosening bonds of the social and economic structure of the preceding age greatly aggravated the situation. In any event, it was a problem of sufficiently long standing to habituate contemporaries to its presence, and accustom them to feel that it was the normal state of affairs. The necessity of the poor represented an accepted economic axiom. It was the justification of a permanent partition of society. Class lines were more rigidly and ruthlessly drawn before the modern era than at any time later. The difference lies in the fact that in the earlier period those partitions were mutely accepted. Later, with the coming of self-consciousness to the under class and the recognition of injustice, the supine became self-assertive. The class-war is the child of an improved standard of living which made dispossessed groups aware of their interests and possibilities. Little of this existed at the opening of the period under discussion. The economic helplessness of a large section of the community assured the continuance of its status of inferiority.

Intimately related to their poverty and, as William

Bell pointed out in a remarkable pamphlet on population in the middle of the century, partly as a consequence of it, was the type of character which came to be associated with the " inferior " classes. They were widely illiterate and, in the decay of the older order with its bulwarks of social discipline, they were frequently demoralized and irresponsible. They were not only a continuous burden on the rates, but also a permanent threat to public order. There was no apprehension more general than the constant fear of disorder. It is true, naturally, that disorder in the minds of contemporaries meant any kind of a threat to the privileges of the fortunate. But it also meant the chaos of unrestrained conduct on the part of the ever-present multitude, whom a depressed standard of life, the decay of habitual morality and the inattention of religion tended to leave without even the guidance of self-respect. Riot and mob were not to be feared because they were a protest against the privileges of the upper classes. The poor were not sufficiently self-conscious to organize for a common purpose. Indeed, they were even incompetent to recognize or support existing forces which would promote their own interests. Mass activity was either capricious violence or it was fomented by those in authority, who craftily appealed to the prejudices and instincts of the herd with motives which were not remotely related to the welfare of the people. Ugly demonstrations were easily aroused by appeals of interested persons who used the impressionable and irresponsible crowd for their own ends. The mass of the people often seemed so depraved that even their best friends and most sympathetic students saw in them a terrifying threat if entrusted with initiative. " Your people is a beast " was not only a representative opinion of the character of the masses in the eighteenth

century; it was the oppressed complaint of the outstanding humanitarian that the century produced.

But if the physical and psychological condition of the unpropertied masses lay at the basis of the prevailing estimate of their civic worth and status, it is as certain that their helplessness was seized upon by exploiting superiors, reinforced by the accidents of the contemporary historical development and clinched by the illiberal tendencies in tradition to prevent any alteration in the attitude which, assigning them an inferior position in society, undertook to keep them there. Of course the failure to recognize any rights of personality when its claims were not founded on economic or social position was not primarily a reasoned judgment. It was a familiar assumption to which habitual practice gave full authority. In case the Christian tradition was strong enough to arouse an uneasy conscience, it was easy to find support for existing discrepancies in the social experience which the eighteenth century inherited. Current aims of popular education and the character of poor relief illustrate the nature of the forces which co-operated to defeat any reappraisal of the values existing in the *status quo*.

There was, first, the structure of contemporary society. Although it was actually in a process of accelerating transition, its institutions, organization and temper were rigid. It was not prepared for the healthy absorption of change. Its dominant mood was the inviolateness of all accepted values. The sanction of habitual usage was the sanction of divinity. Its institutions were the product of an older society, which were not suited to new conditions. In particular, that earlier conception which assigned to each member of the community a place, assuring him certain rights and demanding from him certain duties,

was no longer applicable in the more fluid conditions which had matured since Elizabethan times. Nevertheless, it suited the intuitions and interests of the possessing classes to retain the conception of an assigned "place" in society while overlooking the corresponding guarantee of compensatory rights. There was thus the distortion of attempting to apply old conceptions of social organization to a new and inappropriate situation. It was still impossible to perceive that the novel conditions which were even then appearing made the old conception of a "station" with its corollary, a low degree of class mobility, wholly incongruous. The spirit of liberalism was freedom of movement; the spirit of the age was settled status. The society of the early eighteenth century was still committed to the old ideal.

The existing organization of the community, both political and physical, contributed to make freedom of social and even physical movement impossible. It was not an integrated but a segmented society. Physically, each section was relatively isolated from the rest of the nation. No efficient means of communication existed to encourage the interchange of co-operative effort. The crudest roads and primitive forms of transportation discouraged any but the most persistent in their attempts to move from community to community. Moreover, the rigidity and isolation which governed the unintegrated physical environment were accentuated by political practice. The centralizing authority of the Privy Council had been dissolved at the Restoration and local autonomy entrenched itself in a position of undisputed authority. The virtual rule of the Justices of the Peace, however effective under the given conditions, was not calculated to promote novelty or freedom of movement. It was committed, on

the contrary, to the defence of traditional practices and privileges, and to the promotion of local isolation and fixity. The nation's policy of poor relief immeasurably aggravated the oppression of the poor. Local selfishness worked through poor relief policy to restrict any tendency of the oppressed to break away from their local paralysis in an effort to find relief where it might have been possible to win a livelihood. The Law of Settlement added leverage to the forces which conspired to imprison the poor by an aggressive denial of opportunity.

This meant that the only effectually organized class in the community consisted of those already in possession of authority. The very isolated and unintegrated structure of the country combined with the utter helplessness of the unpropertied to make it inevitable that so far as any policy of government existed it would be identified with the interests of those in power. Nothing was more axiomatic than that political initiative was an exclusive privilege identified with the possession of property. The corollary of the policy was that in civic affairs the unpropertied were but the mute dependents upon what those in authority might do for them. Political power followed economic power, and the concentration of economic power left a large and important class voiceless in the control of their own lives.

An accident of historical development was, at the opening of this period, particularly potent in strengthening and perpetuating the old system of social values. The events of the seventeenth century had bequeathed to the eighteenth century an almost universal mania against change. Enthusiasm of any sort was detested. The memory of the Commonwealth was still vivid. In particular, however, the cry of "No-popery" had assumed

the proportions of a holy obsession uniting all classes against the potential threat to English liberties. The balance of political forces which issued from the Glorious Revolution so completely enlisted the otherwise diverging interests of the nation that, by almost universal consent, the preservation of the *status quo* in society was exalted above all else. Nothing else could have held so effectively in solution both Dissenter and Anglican, rich and poor. And, by reason of this very passionate loyalty, the merest suggestion of novelty, change, or the violation of existing privileges was infused with the force of a violent taboo.

It was not enough, however, to accept the unhumanitarian values existent, from traditional usage alone, or from the facts of the social physiology. Among the upper classes an uneasy conscience demanded placation, while it was urgent to persuade the mass of the people to accept their lot gracefully. In any event, plausible reasons for the inequalities of privilege were currently advanced with the tone of authority. From at least two sources theoretical justification of the apparently unhappy situation was available. Organized religion provided one defence by the use of a relic of Calvinism. It fostered a religious temper exactly suited to the scheme of values in a fixed society with its conception of assigned place and social status. Theology was therefore called upon gratefully to salve the conscience of the possessing and to reconcile the poorer groups to the injustice of their lot. Social theorists have greatly underestimated the potency of the mere sense of justice to guarantee social orderliness. Where the argument of providence convinced the unpropertied that their position was divinely determined, reassured them of their religious worth in spite of their condition, and bade them look to the distant

future for redress, there would be the strongest assurance of contentment and obedience. Religion was therefore frankly employed as the soporific of the poor.

At the close of the seventeenth century this bulwark of religious teaching was reinforced with authority by the spokesmen of the new science of political arithmetic. Their modified form of mercantilism assured a community more and more committed to the ideals of the commercial spirit that the poor were indispensable to the welfare of the nation, since they were necessary as workers. On this ground, it was pointed out, they should be accorded a subsistence-level of life. More than that was held to be inexpedient, both because it demoralized labourers and because it was inconsistent with the productivity of the commercial system. While religion told the majority of the community that they should labour in ambitionless content for supernatural reasons, the economists told them that it was necessary because of the inescapable facts of the economic and political life. Reason used both the natural and the supernatural to impose the old system of illiberal values upon the community.

The existence of the typical attitude of the governing classes towards the mass of the people in the eighteenth century was thus rooted in (1) the helplessness of the unpropertied; (2) the irresponsible character of the poor; (3) the physical structure of the community; (4) the unnatural alliance of forces issuing from the Revolution of 1688; (5) the domination of a Calvinistic tradition; and (6) a national system of economics which was built upon the exploitation of labour. There were, of course, other factors. But these were outstanding forces. The prime conditions of the development of any humanitarian system of values in the eighteenth century were therefore

(1) the extension of the field of economic opportunity, with its attendant effects, and (2) an alteration in the content and quality of individual character in the masses, as the leverage of their free movement and initiative.

Clearly, therefore, the humanitarian movement in England of the period does not coincide merely with the extending scope of a philanthropic impulse. Certainly it is inadequately identified with that section of critical thought which, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England, is known as philosophic radicalism. These were but two representatives of a larger development, of which they, when isolated, are at best only fragments. That development involved the cultural context of an entire society. In this single perspective it may be possible to discover a unity in the many diverging aspects of the community's life which, taken singly, appear to be unrelated. This is to treat the humanitarian movement in the eighteenth century as the entire process by which there was produced a new scale of social values.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A SURVEY of tendencies within significant sections of eighteenth-century society reveals a certain unity in direction. The aggregate evidence describes a large process which was working to discard old values and to mould a new mind in the community.

1. *The Definition of a New Political Ideal*

Eighteenth-century political thought functioned to redefine the theory of the State in terms of personal values. Locke inaugurated the movement by drawing upon a rich fund of ideas wrought out in a century of political conflict to formulate the reasoned principles of the Revolution of 1688. His severely practical aim was to frame the justification of a major political innovation by protesting against irresponsibility in government. But that limited aim led to a re-examination of the nature of civic status on the assumption that a rational purpose was, in fact, inherent in the organized community. It was this that elevated a local event to general significance, for it established two perpetual criteria of political processes: a reliance upon sociology in place of metaphysics, and an appeal to ethics instead of arbitrary authority. From the latter was derived the axiom that the State can be justified only as it secures the welfare of its individual members, while the former

supported the doctrine that Government possesses only that authority which it receives from the consent of its members, whose search for their own welfare gives vitality and meaning to civic organization. The appeal to the historical origins of political society in contract was a fiction which made plausible the thesis of the secular nature of human society. It served psychologically to reinforce the current conviction that the protection of property and the exercise of police powers were the functions of Government demonstrated as valid by historical experience. Social experience was thus frankly admitted as the source of sociological law. Yet Locke was not prepared to accept the literal implications of his own reasoning. While the individual was set up as the beneficiary whose freedom the State existed to guarantee, Locke's thought was moulded around the individual of property. Locke was the spokesman of a class. His theory was more comprehensive than his intent. His perception of the apparent limitations of society is enough to account for his avoidance of a semblance of sympathy with democratic implications. He left unexplored the conditions of freedom for the unpropertied. It remained for succeeding thinkers to discard the limitations of Locke's intention, and to discover validity in the logic of his principles. This led men gradually to give content to the ideal of individual liberty by a vital notion of equality. But the philosophy of 1688 had taken the decisive initial step in its emphasis upon the individual, and in its insistence upon viewing all political forms in their sociological and ethical perspectives.

The work of succeeding political thinkers was to emphasize the realistic and ethical implications of Locke, and thus to extend the frontiers of rights and functions

which the limitations of Locke's age restricted to a class. Before Hume little notable advance was made. An examination of the relation between Church and State which might have provided the leverage for a defence of liberal individualism was rendered sterile by a balance of political forces that made expedient compromise inevitable. Neither Hoadley's denial of the State's competence in matters of religion nor Law's spirited defence of an alliance between the two was as agreeable to the temper of the age as Warburton's stentorian moderation which avoided either extreme. Politicians continued to find the Church a useful adjunct to Government, while the compromising mood of the hour and the diverting interests of commercial expansion eased the burden of a technically disqualified dissent. Yet, whatever temporary triumph of Erastianism followed the controversy, it could not have failed to contribute something to that wider appreciation of a religious equality which was essentially liberal and a fulcrum for radical ideas.

The main line of development was resumed with the acute analysis of Hume. Unessential details of Locke which had come to be obstacles to clear thought were eliminated. The myth of an historical origin of the State in contract was pruned away as an absurdity, where alleged as a fact, and superfluous as a fiction, since the conclusion to which it argued stood irrefutable in its own right. The sociological and ethical criteria were again assumed as wholly adequate and independent of any myth. Hume failed to offer more than isolated though pregnant suggestions for a constructive political philosophy. Like his precursor, however, he distrusted the capacity of the individual to participate in government. Yet he marked a real advance by defining the principle of utility as the

sufficient test of political processes. He even suggested a growing sensitiveness to the prime conditions of individual freedom in the equity with which power is distributed throughout the community.

The grip of the empirical mood, which made Hume's criticism penetrating, rapidly strengthened its hold on English political speculation. It fostered a realistic examination of political forms. That impulse bore fruit in constitutional studies which, stimulated to new effort by Montesquieu, produced the analyses of De Lolme and Blackstone. Even when they professed only worshipful reverence for the achieved perfection of the British Constitution, by directing attention to political realities they contributed to that analytical mood which is the parent of revaluation. Bentham's *Fragment* was the irreverent child of the *Commentaries*. A third notable step in the development was a more original contribution from those foreign influences which again demonstrate the wide scope of the new movement in politics. One of the main deficiencies of Locke in the context of a later age was a narrow limitation of the functions of Government. Following Montesquieu, legislation as an instrument of social policy re-entered the English scene and became, after tragic delay, the most potent single tool of humanitarianism. In the hands of Bentham it was at length joined with the definitive formulation of the utilitarian philosophy to transform the conception of Government from police to the science of public welfare.

The fourth stage of eighteenth-century political thought, drawing its inspiration from Locke, the tradition of Dissent, new forces in the social situation, and specifically from the France of Rousseau, virtually completed the definition of a new political ideal. It embraced those very implications

of his principles which Locke had himself shunned. It gave content to the ideal of individual freedom through a new emphasis upon equality. With the early radicals, a programme of freedom in terms of the entire community began to assume form. Their successors renounced moderation. The distrust of the political competence of man, irrespective of social position, which had characterized all preceding thought, was reversed in the enthusiasm of Paine, while confidence in human perfectibility to achieve an ideal civic society mounted with Godwin to a religious fervour. Indeed Burke, genius of political psychology, is significant in this process as a protest against the rapidity with which the new ideal had been defined. Its adolescent exaltation of personal initiative without regard to competence, its blindness to the organic community, and its disdain for historical experience, violated his appraisal of what ought to be and, in fact, what was possible. His cautious insight was out of touch with the new political fervour which drew upon faith and enthusiasm more than the perspective of experience. But the very virulence of his protest was unmistakable testimony of the strength which the new ideal had already achieved.

This trend in political thought drew its strength from contemporary political events. The age opened with a universal approval of that rigid society in which the direction of public affairs was vested in the landed class. Not even an occasional voice was raised to defend participation in public affairs as a personal right. Paternalism or exploitation in government, and the unquestioned incompetence of the mass of citizens for self-direction, were the two definitive convictions of the political mind at the dawn of the eighteenth century. No one, in fact, can

doubt the essential accuracy of that estimate of the popular qualifications. It followed, therefore, that order being the prime condition of society, the problem was to keep the masses supinely obedient to an arrangement for which providential sanction was claimed.

However, the current of a new spirit began to manifest itself early. Defoe felt impelled to rebuke in scathing terms that independent attitude which prompted ordinary men to regard themselves as worthy as their superiors. A rankling sense of injustice was increasingly the child of that situation in which religious equality in the State was approved in principle, but denied in practice by the imposition of political disqualifications upon Dissent. A group thus thrust out from the community's political councils proceeded to accumulate other forms of power, which were at length certain to command political authority. The balance of forces under which the politically silenced were able to extend their power in the economic world was creating the conditions out of which a claim for political equality would one day issue. The ferment is observable early in the period. In 1742 the complaint was made that "a republican spirit is strangely arisen" in London, proposing that the "people" assume political authority. Parliamentary speeches and numerous pamphlets echoed the same charge uneasily. Five years later an observer reported that "there is no one Subject . . . in which Mankind are so divided in their opinion, as in the means to obtain this sacred blessing" of "liberty and independency."[1] Even Hume, who could not be accused of democratic sympathies, suggested that the "people are no such dangerous monsters as they have been repre-

[1] Anonymous, *An Essay on Liberty and Independency*, p. 1. London, 1747.

sented."[1] The enlarging movement aroused a growing volume of protest. When, in 1770, a writer rose up to excoriate the "romantic notion of liberty" possessed by the "lower sort of people in England," insisting that although the "idea, as far as it may affect the bravery of our troops, may be of some use; . . . the less the manufacturing poor have of it, certainly the better for themselves and the state,"[2] he was already striving against an irresistible current. It represented a real concession to the respectability of the proposals for popular government that they should at length be met by the claim that in fact "every individual has by some means a voice in the affairs of the State."[3] So great had become the prestige of liberal ideas ten years before the French Revolution period that the aims and phrases of the radical agitators were adopted by a section of the new religious movement in a bitter agitation for its own democratic control.

The process by which the disenfranchised became politically conscious and responsible exhibited a similarly striking growth in the period. Mass agitation for political ends, it is true, had been in evidence from the opening of the century. The Sacheverell case, the outcry against Walpole's excise proposals and the insistence upon the Spanish War, the Jewish exclusion outcry in 1753, the Gordon Riots, and a facile use of mob violence, testify to the common employment of an easily incited mass by interested politicians. These instances reveal no promise of democratic control, but rather the exploitation of

[1] Quoted in H. J. Laski, *Political Thought in England from Locke to Bentham*, p. 149.
[2] Anonymous, *An Essay on Trade and Commerce*, pp. 56-57. 1770.
[3] Anonymous, *An Essay on Liberty*, p. 46. 1778.

prejudices almost invariably in opposition to the interests of the masses themselves. On the other hand, the popular demand that called Pitt to head the Government revealed a political intuition finding itself, and the deliberate agitation on the platform against the Cider Tax in 1763 is perhaps the first striking instance of a new method of Government control by organized agitation appealing to intelligent interest.[1] In the last half of the century popular opinion became increasingly a responsible force. Its growth as a leverage of political action was one of the prime contributions of the period to the fertilization of democratic institutions. The seed of that growth was, of course, embedded in the current and curiously illogical English tradition in accord with which it could be said that "public wisdom on some occasions must give way to the popular folly, especially in a free country where the humour of the people must be considered as attentively as the demands of the King in an absolute monarchy."[2] As a matter of necessity, every Government since the Revolution had made the enlistment of general support an avowed object of policy,[3] but the notable advance which the period witnessed was in the extension of the power of wielding political influence to a group which had been unaware of its own political importance and unschooled in the use of civic processes.

The first principle of political practice in the early century was that a voice in the direction of Government affairs was exclusively a privilege of property and not a personal right. Beneath the surface a progressive corrosion

[1] Henry Jephson, *The Platform : Its Rise and Progress*, vol. i., p. 32.
[2] Quoted by Maud Wyndham, *Chronicles of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii., pp. 176-177.
[3] E. and A. G. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, vol. i., p. 273.

of that principle was in progress. Landed interests, the Church and traditional values, were being undermined by the growth of the commercial class, Dissent and social change, even at the very moment when Bolingbroke could affirm that the "landed men are the true owners of our political vessel; the moneyed men, as such, are but passengers in it."[1] The initial steps of a movement for political reform were, however, democratic neither in nature nor intention, though they clearly served as an entering wedge. In fact, the first efforts for definite reform were made because existing conditions were "contrary to the maxim that power should follow property."[2] Property owners and representatives of the moneyed class who calculated to advance their own interests by invoking the old principles were the protagonists of such changes in the political system as would serve their interests. The agitation achieved little. After the Yorkshire unrest the Government in 1782 eliminated certain financial abuses, but left the claims for parliamentary reform untouched. After Pitt's futile effort to extinguish a group of rotten boroughs this conservative branch of the reform enterprise ceased to be active for a time.

The genuinely radical agitation was more persistent. An arbitrary assertion of parliamentary authority made Wilkes an accidental symbol of radical aims and furthered the reform programme. In organizing the Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights in 1769 it set an example for the further use of political societies. An impetus was given to the practice of promoting political discussion

[1] Bolingbroke, *Works*, iii., 174; quoted by Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii., p. 178.

[2] Alderman Beckford's speech, reported in *Read's Weekly Journal*, April 11, 1761; quoted in Henry Jephson, *The Platform*, etc., vol. i., p. 20.

through public meetings. Not less significant was the establishment of the right to publish parliamentary debates. The deliberate appeal to public intelligence was a vital step towards making governmental responsibility to popular judgment a working device. Though himself devoid of radical sympathies, the trenchant pen of Junius was a powerful instrument of this powerful discontent. The radical reform movement was not, at first, representative of the entire country. It was essentially a London movement that was later to serve as the centre from which organized activity would radiate. Initially, it found little support even in the growing towns of the north. If, on the one hand, the mass of people had not become politically self-conscious, on the other hand, disqualified Dissent and the new *laissez-faire* commercial mind fostered an attitude of aloofness to politics. Even when agitation became more general and insistent, early in the succeeding century, it was an open boast that the newly industrialized populations were untainted by radical disaffection and sympathies. Eighteenth-century radicalism centred in London as a dominantly middle-class movement. Only later did it seep down through the lower strata of society.[1] Speculative Dissenting writers led the way, and bourgeois sympathizers supplied the leadership. Their immediate programme was summed up by Major Cartwright, who argued for manhood franchise as purely a personal right, and for the thesis that "parliamentary representatives are delegates"—demands which, in Cartwright's judgment, issued from the common assumption that all men are religiously equal.

Measured by the characteristic attitude towards a personal right to political initiative and confidence in the

[1] C. B. R. Kent, *The English Radicals*, p. 70.

capacity of every man to exercise that right, the period presents a striking advance. It opened, in both opinion and practice, with the conviction that the individual was incompetent to exercise self-government, and that every claim to a political voice except on the basis of property was preposterous. It ended with both of these fundamental assumptions challenged on grounds of moral right and social experience, while the promise of larger achievements was already discernible. The movement was to suffer repression in the reaction of the revolutionary period, but its persistence was also to attest the strong grip it had already secured on the imagination and will of the community.

2. *The Ferment of Economic Freedom*

The definition of a new political ideal was not an isolated achievement in an otherwise indifferent period. Long before that ideal received general approval, even more potent forces moved to compel a reappraisal of the social values which governed the life of the community. The new political ideas were, in fact, dependent upon those very forces for their fertilization. The accepted political maxims reserved political initiative as the exclusive prerogative of one form of economic power. It would not have been unnatural, therefore, for the liberal thinkers to equate the task of achieving their ideal of individual freedom with the extension of economic power throughout the community. No serious liberal of Locke's age was foolhardy enough to propose so fantastic a proposition. It was as undebatable that private property was the foundation of free institutions as that the inherent limitations of the economic order imposed upon the many a relative

poverty. The most realistic approach to politics could not surmount the veto of the environment. It remained for the economic forces which seemed to paralyse liberal aspirations to work an inexorable revolution.

The State system of economics which the period inherited started from the assumption of a national economic policy fostered by government and determining the place and claims of individual members of the community. That policy was framed around a conception of the nation's balance of trade as its dependable measure of prosperity. The mercantilist theories had already undergone significant modification in respect to how this trade was an index of national welfare. Moreover, a growing protest had been accumulating late in the seventeenth and early in the eighteenth centuries against that form of governmental paternalism which hindered trade by paralysing restrictions. The trend to economic liberalism was therefore apparent at the end of the seventeenth century, even when the logic of its principles was not extended to political values. For it continued to be the essence of the prevailing theory to identify public policy with the interests of the dominant classes. Economic thought joined the vested interests in the community in maintaining the conservative values of class status as the justification of a frank class exploitation. Openly admitting that the productive processes of the State were dependent upon its labour power, representative economists maintained that it was an inescapable necessity of the economic order that the mass of workers could receive for their service only sufficient return to ensure a subsistence-level of life. This, it was claimed, was necessary also because of the mentality of the people, as well as the frugality of nature in permitting enough wealth to enable only a few

to enjoy a high level of life. It was therefore argued, as both a normal and providential order of things, that the many must serve the interests of the few, the bare injustice of the position being veiled by a series of rationalizations, such as, that the many best served their own interests in this manner because their subsistence-level of life would be forced even lower except for the beneficence of the system; that, in fact, the virtues of poverty were a compensatory gain; that the poor thus avoided the overwhelming burdens of the rich; and that, as Burke phrased the judgment a century later, the deserts of the poor would be adjusted in "the final proportions of eternal justice." In short, the economists at the opening of the period argued that for the mass of citizens in the State only supine obedience to the few was consistent with national welfare. The well-being of each member of society was not conceived as a practicable measure of national health.

The movement of events, however, fostered the trend to economic innovation. With the extension of commercial organization there developed a growing irritation against governmental paternalism which shaped public policy for the gain of a few. Mandeville gave a graphic if shocking form to implications of Locke in asserting that the public welfare was best served by the operation of the unregulated principle of self-interest. Hume, with customary incisiveness, revealed the sophistry of the current balance of trade measure of national welfare and the harmful effects of artificial interferences with the normal commercial processes. By the time of Smith the experience of the influential commercial class and the reasoned body of criticism from a multitude of observers had prepared the ground for an authoritative formulation of those doctrines

of economic law which were to contribute so effectively to the apotheosis of the individual.

The resulting significance of Smith in contrast to the doctrine which preceded him lay in the fact that the individual was defined as the measure, and his economic initiative the means, of public welfare. It was an eminently practical conclusion, expressing the temper of a new and strong class, who were prepared to identify the policy of the Government with their own interests, but found government an unworkable instrument for that purpose. In the Lockian descent, the definitive formulation of this view threw into focus the fact that the economic freedom of the individual was, in fact, the root of civil liberty. Smith approached the problem by the same avenue as Locke. He appealed to sociology and ethics as the criteria of social processes. He undertook to rest his system on fundamentals by seeking the self-evident authority of "nature." This meant, primarily, generalizing from observations of recent social experience, and for that reason the deficiencies of Smith proved to be the incompleteness of the experience of a single period. In the second place, he gave conclusive expression to the absurdity of calculating the community's welfare in terms of national income when the only intelligible criterion was plainly an appraisal of the benefit secured to its individual members. He substituted "wealth per head for wealth in the aggregate," considering "the nation wealthy or not wealthy according as its average worker is wealthy or not wealthy."[1]

This empirical approach led to the classic definition of economic liberalism. In each of the important economic processes which are beneficial to society Smith discovered

[1] Edwin Cannan, *Economica*, No. 17, p. 126.

an argument against the blundering interference of external forces, like those exercised by Government. On the other hand, the division of labour, the use of money, the flow of capital, the regulating adjustment of supply and demand, and all the defensible economic processes, demonstrated clearly that the root of economic health is personal interest. The beneficial functioning of economic society flows, said Smith, from "the natural effort of every individual to better his own condition."[1] Thus the "essential spring of human life and social progress" was traced to the single source of individual initiative. There was no room here for either of the main theses of the preceding nationalistic doctrines advocating an active government policy in support of vested interests, and the subordination of the mass of the people to serve the policy of the few. All groups are necessary to the producing machinery of society, and the self-interest of each will, according to the principle of the division of labour, locate an individual in that situation for which he is best fitted. Unfortunately, while Smith recognized the prime importance of distribution, his emphasis as the spokesman of his generation was on the productive processes. At the same time, he did not fall a victim to the doctrine that Government was wholly unqualified to act aggressively for the benefit of the community. The functions of Government were, in fact, outlined broadly. In addition to the promotion of justice, and the maintenance of peace and national defence, it has the "duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit

[1] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Cannan Edition), vol. i., p. 324.

could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society." [1] Moreover, individual action as the principle of social health must be an enlightened private enterprise, embodying a real personal interest, and in which the individual's activity must be made to serve the ends of justice by means of competition. The fact that these qualifying considerations were later overlooked, at the same time that the impotence of government fostered grave social evils, should not obscure the fact that when the Government stood for an antiquated system of interference in the interests of a class the new economic thought propagated the doctrine of equal economic opportunity, and voiced its full confidence in the individual's capacity to exercise initiative with profit to both himself and the community. If economic power was the basis of political initiative, as was patent to eighteenth-century conservatives and progressives alike, economic liberalism was a leverage of political liberty.

The carefully empirical generalizations of the new economic outlook were, however, but an index of the extent to which English society had already come under the sway of a new type of economic organization. Mercantilism, it is true, had been the doctrine of trade extension, but it had allied itself with the rigid forces of the tradition, in maintaining the inviolability of the old conservative social values. The feverish commercial expansion which had grown, at an ever-accelerating rate, from the very opening of the eighteenth century was not only dissolving the viewpoint of mercantilism, but also those social institutions which were at once the sanction and the force

[1] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Cannan Edition), vol. ii., p. 185.

of the old order. The landed interests with the Church against the commercial interests with Dissent are approximate symbols of a continuous conflict in the period. At every point where there was contact the latter moved forward. The new economic forces were, in the Webbs' phrase, the true anarchists of the eighteenth century, ruthlessly rooting up every practice and institution obstructing the emergence of the new society.

All of the major characteristics of an industrial revolution were in evidence before 1760. If it is roughly true that a neutralizing balance of forces between 1688 and 1750 produced a superficial appearance of stagnation in political life, no such charge can be levelled at the nation's economic progress. All three divisions of the economic revolution—the commercial, the physiographic and the mechanical—were in progress, even though the more spectacular developments of the latter two matured in the last half of the century. These, with the agrarian changes incident to the enclosures and new-method farming, were transforming the material basis of the community. The country had been ripe for these changes from the outset of the period. Internally it constituted the largest free-trade area in Europe, the Union with Scotland having erased one barrier in 1707. Externally, English commerce had created markets in every quarter. The financial requirements for a trade expansion had stimulated the development of banking facilities. It is not strange, then, that the leading woollen-cloth industry increased more than 300 per cent. from 1688 to 1760, a swift development which did not stand alone. Much of this growth was under a definitely capitalist form of organization, in which the worker was in effect a wage-earner even when he carried on his employment at home and in conjunction

with small farming. In respect to health and wages, the conditions under which labourers worked frequently engendered abuses equal to those later associated exclusively with factory regimentation. Grievances could pass unobserved when they were merely local and when labour possessed no voice to advertise its distress. A Newcastle newspaper in 1767 reported naïvely that "the catastrophe from foul-air" in the mines "becomes more common than ever; yet, as we have been requested to take no particular notice of these things, which, in fact, could have little good tendency, we drop the farther mentioning of it."[1]

The limits imposed upon further commercial expansion were in consequence of three insistent obstacles: primitive communications, insufficient labour power, and inadequate producing facilities to supply demand. The record of the last half of the eighteenth century details the vigorous manner in which these three imperatively felt needs were satisfied. The first caused the digging of a series of vastly important canal systems, and provoked a fever of road-building. The second led to a demand for workers, which absorbed much of the surplus labour power of the agrarian thrust, tending to nullify some of the oppressive power of the Poor Law policy that forbade the physical movement of the poor, and helping to overcome the restrictive effects of the old apprenticeship laws. The last stimulated enormously the search for mechanical means to increase production. The age of machines merely accelerated an already far-reaching development. The consequences of the whole movement were most striking in the cotton industry, where, with the adoption of new textile machinery

[1] James Everett, *The Wall's End Miner*, p. 225, from *The Newcastle Journal* of March 21, 1767.

and the successful adaptation of water- and steam-power, centralized production on a large scale set the standard for modern industrial methods.

The factory concentration involved a sudden increase in the quantity of goods produced for market. On the other hand, marketing factors became immensely more important, because of the greater danger of instability. The large growth in the number of industrial workers dependent entirely upon their wages and unable to supplement their income from small farming created a new social situation, totally unfamiliar to previous social experience. Only the greatest distress could result either from overproduction or a dislocation of markets, especially when this was accompanied by an inexperienced and impotent Government. But exactly these three factors were inevitably thrust into the social situation to disrupt the healthy development of the new society. The chaos of uncontrolled production repeatedly brought failure in its train before the end of the century. Still more dire were the strains and dislocations caused by the wars with the American colonies and with France, which produced distress due to economic conditions on a scale never before known. The consequent existence of a multitude of social evils testifies less to a callous conscience in the community than to the fact that forces which might have been definitely allied to humanitarian aims developed in chaos.

This economic development served both to destroy and to create the conditions by which a new series of social values were being bred into English society. No other forces in the eighteenth century were so largely responsible for remoulding the habits of the community. In addition, the movement made equally important contributions to the

ideal of the free initiative of the common man. Both in its reasoned outlook and in its practice it set up the individual as the sole agency of achievement. The really vital effect was, more than any other contemporary force, to make accessible the economic power which was imperative if the individual in his social context was to achieve his freedom. One of the striking signs of that power made accessible was the social mobility which the new economic processes promoted. The caste tradition had, of course, never been strong enough in England to refuse rare ability and achievement an entrance from the "inferior" to the "superior" groups. But the multitude of opportunities which the unparalleled commercial and industrial expansion of the eighteenth century created, combined with the abolition of corporate and legislative restrictions, made social mobility increasingly normal. Other factors contributed to that result, it is true, but in the main those were factors which had operated at an earlier time without notable effect. The newly created opportunity was the really novel determinant. The records are replete with cases of altering social status following upon successful enterprise—an alteration which was frequently less noticeable in the social outlook of the original generation, but emphatically evident in the second generation, in the form of new tastes, new demands, and new standards of life.

3. *The Evolution of the Philanthropic Impulse*

One of the high-lights of the eighteenth century was the vigour of its philanthropic spirit. It strikes the casual observer as an anomaly that an age which was so often coarse in its tastes, viciously callous in its punishments, and vulgar in many of its pleasures, should, at the same

time, have been distinguished for its sensitiveness to human distress. A partial explanation lies in the fact that both the distress and much of the prevailing coarseness issued from the very dissolution of social bonds which was, at the same time, stimulating interest and inquiry regarding social conditions. There were also the broadest contrasts of attitude in the very movement of philanthropy itself. Not all of the philanthropic impulse was humanitarian in quality. In fact, the temper of the response made to social distress was a reliable index of the process in which a new humanity was being developed. Philanthropy presents in graphic form the same movement discovered in other departments of the nation's life. A survey of its manifestations makes clear not only an ever-widening stream of social relief, but also a growth in appreciation of the problem of social need and, significantly, a progressive rejection of the early motives. Starting from attitudes reflecting the entrenched system of social values, the old temper was gradually discredited, and there emerged a new respect for personality in its civic context —followed, in point of time, with a recrudescence, at the end of the century, of that early conservatism which by then a large part of the community had outgrown. In respect to its prompting motives and its methods, as well as its volume, the period witnessed an evolution in philanthropy that was amazing, because in so short a time it passed from the patronizing attitude of tradition to a new conception involving ultimately a complete reorientation of social evaluations.

The first notable advance in the period was the invention of a novel method of treating social distress. When the Restoration failed to revive an effective central authority for the control of poor relief, only the tradition of the Poor

Law remained in the hands of chaotic local authorities. At the same time, the altering material basis of society was increasingly creating new problems of social maladjustment to harass communities already burdened by heavy rates. The void was filled by a striking growth of private agencies, in which persons organized for specific projects of social relief. It may be, as has been suggested, that the contemporary popularity of joint-stock enterprise in the commercial world contributed to the rise of this type of philanthropy. In any event, the widest variety of projects which followed, constitute an imposing record. A simple enumeration of them bears witness to the strength and the changing quality of the impulse.

At the beginning of the period there appeared a group of activities, primarily religious in motive, but usually associated with a practical purpose. The numerous religious societies, which were the lineal ancestors of the Wesleyan groups, were the embodiment of a devout consciousness, but, like their descendants in the succeeding century, they often supplemented their main programme by charitable service. Organized attempts to control the conduct of citizens, such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners, were partly the reaction of the co-operating sectarian interests outraged by the violation of common standards of moral conduct, but all religious groups of the period accepted it as one of their prime functions to maintain public peace, in behalf of the existing order. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1698, avowed both religious and secular aims. In the publication of pious literature and the support of missionary work it manifested that strong and growing sense of responsibility for the spiritual welfare of men which produced the modern missionary movement. Previously

Protestant missions had been regarded as a state enterprise. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was founded in 1701 to provide religious ministration to Englishmen in foreign lands. Neither of these societies undertook at first to Christianize the heathen, but the S.P.C.K. did support missionary enterprise conducted under foreign initiative, such as the Danish mission in India, and it set about to publish Christian literature in the languages of various non-Christian peoples. In 1709 the S.P.C.K. in Scotland sent out a missionary venture to the American Indians.

The movement that centred in the provision of elementary education illustrates the mixed motives of early eighteenth-century philanthropy. Religious interest, poor-relief aims and the function of police were yoked together. The growing practice of employing cheap child-labour toward the end of the seventeenth century itself provided a new instrument of philanthropy. Firmin had experimented with schools of industry in which the prime motive was to provide for the material needs of the poor. In the extensive system of charity schools sponsored by the S.P.C.K.—and copied by others—however, there appeared a larger element of self-interest on the part of the patrons of the schools. Contemporary confidence in the power of education to form character was reflected in the policy of religious training with a modicum of the most elementary instruction to make the poor pious, orderly and content in their station. Public criticism that the children were in fact being made ambitious led later to a re-emphasis in the schools of the S.P.C.K., in which the provision of work and the aim of inuring children to a laborious life was ranked first, while careful measures were adopted to prevent instruction which would render the poor unfit for their depressed

situations. This aim of training in industrious habits was also made the prime end of such instruction as was offered in the workhouses.

None of these ventures in popular education of the first half of the century is comparable in spontaneity and extent with the rise and expansion of the Sunday-school movement in the last quarter of the century. That very fact is equally an index of a new awareness of need among the poorer sections of the community which embraced the meagre facilities of the new schools so greedily. The Sunday-school movement traced its historical starting-point to the act of a layman and a clergyman of the Establishment. It was religious in its association and in its prime aim. The temper which its motives revealed, however, varied with the group providing it. To a large section, mainly from the Establishment, the earliest aims of the charity schools were revived, and the Sunday schools, while rendering a pious service to the poor, were also viewed as an instrument of subjecting them to the assumed necessities of the existing economic order. To another section, relatively free from the class consciousness of the dominant group, the schools were rather the instrument of service to the religious needs of the masses, with the additional provision of useful elementary instruction.

The real significance of this first popular movement for education on a national scale lay in the fact that it was part of a still larger awakening in the community. The eighteenth century discovered the idea of universal education as a condition of civic competence. In the hands of a small number, notably the early radical thinkers, there was defined the ideal of an unfettered popular education as a civic right. The seeds of secularization had been sown

by court decisions denying any single religious group a monopoly of teaching. The tendency of the small section of progressive educators during the period was toward a practical curriculum, of which the practice of imparting instruction in English was typical. As early as 1756 it was suggested that "in every state it should be a fundamental maxim that the education of youth should be particularly formed and adapted to the nature and end of its government." [1] A few years later another writer proposed "universal instruction imposed by law with a view to instilling the 'manners and principles on which alone the State can rest.'" [2] But if the alignment of social forces and the unavoidable bias of government made state education impossible for another century, the principle of universal popular instruction received increasing support. Priestley in 1768 set the radical standard by affirming the principle of popular education independent of public control, a condition later re-emphasized by Godwin and others. Paine, in 1791, declared that "a nation under a well-regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed," insisting that while government should aid private enterprise in the matter of expense, it should not control education. The position received much the most respectable support in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Smith made an exception to the rule of non-interference by government in the matter of education, making it clear, however, that "the state's part should be limited to making elementary instruction compulsory and to supplying the money required to meet any deficiency in

[1] Quoted by J. W. Adamson, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. xiv., p. 400, from Thomas Sheridan, *British Education*.

[2] Quoted by J. W. Adamson, *Ibid.*, from John Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty* (1765).

voluntary contributions."[1] Malthus, like Smith, felt that popular education was indispensable to the welfare of the state, and voiced his confidence in the individual who was to be thus bred to citizenship. All of this was a far cry from the mood which at the outset of the period assumed that the individual could not be trusted with secular instruction. It was an important stage in this transition of education from the ægis of the Church to the State which was reached at the turn of the century in the formation of societies of Lancaster and of Bell for the provision of elementary instruction.

The community's response to the problems of the destitute sick and helpless revealed in its least-impaired form the strength of the philanthropic spirit and the quality of its motives. At the opening of the century hospital facilities were practically non-existent. There followed an unprecedented interest in the provision of relief for the destitute sick. In London, Guy's Hospital was founded, in 1724, from a bequest of a fortunate participant in the South Sea speculation, while Westminster, St George's, London, and Middlesex hospitals were all founded between 1719 and 1746, by public subscription, chiefly from persons of small means. Other hospitals for special ailments followed, including three maternity hospitals from 1749 to 1752, and St Luke's Hospital for lunatics in 1751. Partly as the result of a dispute between apothecaries and physicians, free service to the poor had been adopted as a policy by bodies of those professions as early as 1687, and free medical service of a sort was provided at various workhouses during the century. After the founding of the Royal Dispensary

[1] J. W. Adamson, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. xiv., pp. 399-401.

in 1777 similar ventures elsewhere multiplied. A corresponding concern for the health needs of the poor appeared in the provinces, partly copying the London example and partly inspired by Continental foundations. Thus hospitals were founded in Winchester in 1736, in Bristol in 1737, in York in 1749, in Exeter in 1741, and before the close of the century they were to be found in most of the principal towns of the country. The notoriously vicious treatment of the insane inspired the founding of a more humane institution in York by Quakers. A society was even formed to assist those who, though discharged as well from hospitals, were destitute of the means of immediate livelihood. The mere recognition of need proved sufficient to stimulate associations for the widest variety of specific relief. French and German immigrants received both public and private aid. Orphanages were founded, as the Royal Asylum of St Anne for the children of parents who had been in good circumstances, or for local needs, as in the case of the Westmorland Society's School. The Foundling Hospital was chartered in 1739 and continued under private support until Government grants discouraged the supply of private funds, when it reverted to private support in 1760. The initiative of Jonas Hanway led, among his other philanthropic ventures, to the founding of reforming institutions. The Royal Humane Society commanded a wide support for its undertakings when instituted in 1775. In 1784 there grew out of a society for aiding indigent Scots a Society of Universal Good Will, the purpose of which was to assist all foreigners who were in need. The primary significance of all this philanthropic activity was the prevalence of a temper to which it testified. A large part of the initiating enterprise belonged to the period of cold rationality in the nation's religious life,

when religion was identified with moral duty. The humane sentiment of the community was quick to respond when it saw a condition of social distress. "No sooner is a new species of misery brought to view," said Samuel Johnson, in 1758, "and the design of relieving it proposed than every hand is open to contribute something, every tongue is busied in solicitation and every art of pleasure is employed for a time in the interest of Virtue." [1] This was true, even when it is also admitted that much of the philanthropy followed upon a desire for prestige and the flattery of expressed gratitude. The expansiveness of the philanthropic impulse indicates clearly an integrating society and the extension of civic intelligence, following as it did "from an increasing recognition, which seems to indicate a growth of intelligence and power of observing facts." [2]

The community's treatment of two other social evils—slavery and prison abuses—not only charts the progress of the growth of humane sentiment in the century, but also marks the achievement of a new era in philanthropy. The period that opened with an attempt to meet the flagrant conditions of social distress by voluntary charity, either casual or organized, closed by the first definite use of educative propaganda to compel the use of political instruments for the promotion of social policy. In both instances a growing sensitiveness to social responsibility and a developing social intelligence were made manifest.

Public sentiment towards slavery completely reversed itself within the limits of the period under review. That article of the Treaty of Utrecht which gave England its grip on the slave trade was acclaimed as one of the

[1] Quoted by F. J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England*, pp. 28-29.

[2] B. K. Gray, *A History of English Philanthropy*, pp. 124-125.

greatest triumphs of the pacification of 1713, while the denunciation of the slave trade was popularly esteemed the most admirable article of the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. At the earlier date the slave trade was regarded simply as a profitable branch of the carrying trade, and the community was simply not aware of its moral implications. Locke condemned it unequivocally in the logic of his theory, but was apparently not even conscious of a contradiction when, in compiling the laws of Carolina, he provided legal recognition for property in slaves. There followed a ferment of sentiment for fifty years. The assumption of the religious value of the negro's human soul was unmistakably the most potent single leaven leading to change. In 1685 an Anglican clergyman from Barbados denounced the trade. Baxter had already sounded the same note. Slavery was barred by the charter founding Georgia, and although that followed partly from economic motives of self-interest, Oglethorpe himself declared that "slavery is against the Gospel as well as the fundamental law of England," and he testified that therefore the trustees of the colony refused "to make a law permitting such a horrid crime!"[1] John Wesley's early contact with slaves inspired a sincere concern for their spiritual welfare without a denunciation of the institution of slavery. This was the typical attitude of the S.P.C.K., which, in 1750, published a volume of sermons "*upon the Great and Indispensable Duty of all Christian Masters and Mistresses to bring up their Negro Slaves in the Knowledge and Fear of God.*"[2] But it was the Quakers above all others who were the consistent initiators of anti-slavery sentiment and agitation. In the preceding century

[1] Elijah Hoole, *Oglethorpe and the Wesleys in America.* 1863.
[2] Thomas Bacon, *Four Sermons.* 1750.

Fox had suggested that slaves be permitted to earn their freedom. The Yearly Meeting of 1727 definitely condemned both the slave trade and slavery, an action that was confirmed by later meetings and enforced by the sanction of expulsion.

At the same time the trend of sentiment found wide expression in contemporary literature. Defoe struck at the trade in *The Reformation of Manners*, advocated better treatment of negroes in the *Life of Colonel Jacque*, and painted the good qualities of the negro in *Crusoe*. James Thomson depicted the horrors of the slave trade early in the century. Samuel Johnson attacked the evil vehemently as early as 1740, appealing with singular inconsistency to the doctrine of original equality. Following from the revived interest in travel, and the speculation which Locke had made popular, the middle of the century witnessed the idealization of primitive peoples—a temper conducive to friendliness towards the negro. The current of political literature issuing from France in Montesquieu and Rousseau also contributed its powerful support to the growing sentiment.

The slave trade had itself been growing. Soon after the middle of the century calculated agitation began. A Quaker, Anthony Benezet, who had dedicated his life to the task of arousing sentiment against the evil, published three attacks on it between 1762 and 1771. His *Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies on the Calamitous State of Enslaved Negroes*, in 1766, was circulated, " particularly among persons attending schools and colleges," and " six hundred copies were sent to the Members of both Houses of Parliament." The agitation which followed in growing volume proceeded from no single group. Granville Sharp actively espoused the

legal status of liberty for the negro in England in 1768, but not until the Somerset case in 1772 and the Knight case in 1788 outlawed slavery in the British Isles was the first legal battle of the movement won. Wesley, stimulated by reading Benezet, published a trenchant and widely distributed condemnation of slavery in 1774, and enlisted the active support of his movement against the institution. Adam Smith added his voice against the system, on economic as well as humanitarian grounds. It was a cause with which the radicals were in quick sympathy, and Paine repeated in unison with Wesley that slavery was "contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of justice and Humanity, and even good policy."[1] The Society of Friends presented to Parliament the first address for its abolition in 1783, and "circulated many thousand copies of an appeal to the public . . . entitled 'The Case of our Fellow Creatures, the Oppressed Africans.'"[2] Clarkson, aroused by reading Benezet's book while a student at Cambridge in 1784, joined with Sharp and nine members of the Society of Friends in 1787 to form an association to correlate the scattered forces opposed to the slave trade. By 1788 a writer on political economy was already justified in saying: "The slave trade has long been considered as disgraceful to an enlightened age, and in this country a spirit is arisen which seems bent on annihilating it altogether, or so changing the nature of it as to blend humanity with the policy."[3] For its public leadership the political movement subsequently drew its chief figures from the Evangelicals, of whom Wilberforce

[1] Quoted by F. J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England*, p. 53.

[2] W. L. Mathieson, *England in Transition, 1789-1832*, p. 65.

[3] Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce*, vol. iv., p. 677.

was the outstanding figure. Thus was it possible for every religious group in the community to combine with the unreligious humanitarians for a common aim. The country had moved forward in its moral perceptions. No single group could claim exclusive credit for the initiation and prosecution of an anti-slavery movement which marked the century's development in the community's outlook.

The significance of the second instance of eighteenth-century political philanthropy, prison reform, proceeded from the same sensitizing of the public conscience and the deliberate effort to inform that conscience for political ends. It illustrates again how dependent both of these were upon the integration of the community. The helpless condition of prisoners had previously elicited only the sporadic relief of casual charity. The first half of the century is a period in which, parallel to the mounting evils in prison administration, there was developing an awareness of the social nature of the problem. Between the Restoration and 1688 the attention of philanthropists was directed towards imprisoned debtors. Firmin undertook to offer personal aid, and even sought legal help against the oppression of gaolers. After the organization of the S.P.C.K. one of its members made a study proposing reforms, while Bray raised relief funds and preached to prisoners. Throughout the century, in fact, prison visitation, chiefly for religious purposes, was encouraged. Often it led to an interest in material needs as well, and, in any event, it served to spread information regarding prison conditions. Oglethorpe secured a parliamentary investigation into intolerable abuses early in the century, but the time was not ripe for any genuinely remedial legislation. He did, however, undertake to promote colonization

as a means of relief for imprisoned debtors. James Neild, another outstanding figure in the early period, in the spirit of the time, founded an association for the relief of debtors and engaged in prison reform propaganda.

The really popular movement against prison abuses, however, was awaiting leadership and more effective means of public information. The experience of the workers of the Wesleyan group led to pointed protests, both in the press and through the societies, against the disgrace of conditions. The humane temper of the age was crystallized into an organized force by the leadership, investigations and propaganda of John Howard, who began to make a study of prisons in 1773 and published his *State of the Prisons* in 1777. As early as 1774 the newly informed public conscience bore fruit in Acts dealing with the abuses of fees to gaolers and some of the unhealthy conditions of prison facilities. Later legislation extended the scope of those reforms. Progress in the agitation was slow, being compelled to wait upon the reform of local government. Yet it remains that before the close of the century, under the impact of a public conscience that had begun to be informed, Government had definitely accepted the theory that it was responsible for the treatment of prisoners and the character of prison administration.

4. *The Diminishing Fear of Insecurity*

The major developments of the age do not stand alone in their significance for the humanitarian movement. In every important section of the community there appeared those altering conditions which presaged a revision of the accepted appraisal of the individual.

The conditions which were bringing to birth a new

political ideal, creating unheard-of economic opportunity, and sensitizing the public conscience, were also suited to stimulate a growing interest in the conservation of physical life. The redistribution of population during the century was accompanied by a rapid growth of numbers, but that resulted not so much from a pronounced increase in the number of births as in the improved conditions of the environment. It is true that the decay of apprenticeship, the notable growth of new trades unshackled by the old restrictions, and the virtual negation of the settlement requirements, where new industrial conditions prevailed, levelled the barriers of early marriage and contributed to the rise of the birth-rate. That rate increased moderately until 1790, when a decrease became manifest. The more important cause of the growth in population followed from factors which acted to decrease the death-rate. The enclosures operated as an agent of displacement and often involved great hardship, but they also brought a larger area under the cultivation of the newly improved agricultural practices. Until after 1821, moreover, the number of families engaged in agriculture increased. In any event it is claimed that "throughout the enclosure movement of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the quantity and quality of the food, both grain and meat, improved."[1] Impossible as it is to measure the increase in consumption power spread throughout the community, contemporaries were certain that the level of material life had been raised perceptibly in the period prior to the dislocations of the Napoleonic era. Historical scholarship tends, on the whole, to concur in that judgment.

On the other hand, the age witnessed a real awakening of interest in improving the conditions of the present en-

[1] G. T. Griffith, *Population Problems of the Age of Malthus*, p. 175.

vironment. The slower pace by which the towns enlarged before 1775 seems to have been characterized by improving conditions and a declining death-rate, which gave way to the evils of congestion and unhygienic living conditions during the irresponsible growth of the succeeding period. In any event, a mounting appreciation of the importance of public health and personal hygiene was unmistakable, even though the progress seemed sluggish measured by the standards of later achievement, and in spite of the fact that the community moved slowly to eradicate those conditions in the environment which bred disease. A new interest in medical education asserted itself. The hospital and dispensary movement took shape. After 1750 the mortality-rate from fevers declined rapidly in London. The prevalence of dysentery declined. The means of protection against scurvy became more general as the food supply improved. Inoculation against smallpox had been initiated in 1722, and, although of doubtful value, the use of vaccination at the end of the century was revolutionary in its achievement. The infant mortality-rate was lowered by the development of midwifery and the founding of maternity hospitals.

All of these factors conspired to raise the level of the community's health and to promote its peace of mind. In the process it turned men's thoughts to the conditions of present welfare. Few influences were more potent in the eighteenth century than the oppressive sense of insecurity which the fear of death and the general interest in otherworldly safety, so universal among the poorer groups of the period, makes graphic. The diminishing fear of insecurity was both a symptom and a cause of an emerging class.

5. *The Democratization of Literature*

The literature of the eighteenth century was at once a sign of a changing spirit and an agent in the creation of that spirit. Fresh forms, suited to the tastes and needs of a more popular following, were invented. Writers drew their subject-matter increasingly from the world of the average man. Literature became a means of integrating the popular mind and promoting those very democratic values towards which men were more or less clearly reaching out.

The public press was virtually the creation of the eighteenth century. It signalized the birth of a new force in the community. After a comparatively brief period of experimentation it became a means of disciplining government policy to popular judgment. It bears witness to the character of the century's tendencies that the scope and prestige of the press matured so rapidly in spite of being handicapped in every conceivable way. The first *Weekly News* had appeared in 1621, the bi-weekly *London Gazette* in 1665, but the real development waited until after the Revolution. The first daily newspaper was published in 1702, and Defoe adopted the narrative form for the press in 1703. The first provincial newspaper started in Norwich in 1702, and was followed in rapid succession by other communities. The Stamp Tax levied in 1712 crushed out lower-priced sheets, it is true, and made newspapers so expensive that their circulation was confined to a restricted class. Nevertheless, they supplied so urgent a need during the formative period of a more popular political system that they exercised increasingly a power in civic affairs. The intensified interest aroused in politics by the aggressive ideas of George III., and the growing strength of reform

programmes, elevated further the public importance of the press. One result of the Wilkes agitation was to establish more securely the indispensable freedom of the press, by discountenancing the arbitrary interference of government. A successful defence of the practice of publishing parliamentary reports then decisively settled the rôle of the newspaper in political life.

The advent to influence of the new commercial class was itself responsible for a reorientation of literary standards. The seventeenth century had scarcely turned when the empirical mood was strikingly illustrated by a literature devoted to the "things useful to mankind." It took the form of the new periodicals which issued from the environment of the coffee-houses. Steele and Addison voiced the unspoken mind of the new middle class in the form of a "humanized Puritanism." It was a path leading definitely to the later democratic movement, which was essentially an extension of the earlier middle-class achievement.

The poetry of the period shared in a process of democratization. It passed through a gradual if uneven transition from the verse of aristocratic circles to the poetry of the people. The polished verse of Pope itself shared in some measure that general European revolt against the artificial. As far as its rationalism and severe form seem from the emotional and naturalistic interests of the succeeding age, it nevertheless represented a step in the transition, in its search for what reason demonstrated to be natural, its interest in man and even in its vigorous idiom. When the rigid forms of the classical verse provoked a reaction in a search for freedom and spontaneity, it was only to carry on and expand the naturalistic tendency and the social interest already impregnated in the tone of the English literary world. After Goldsmith the movement merged into that

contagious romanticism in which the spontaneity of an intense personalism was the guiding impulse. The worship of personal values which dominated the political romanticists at the end of the eighteenth century measures the completeness with which literary tastes had been transformed.

The most original literary invention of the age became at the same time a vehicle of education in moulding and reflecting the life and desires of the common man. Defoe had written realistically for popular consumption. With Richardson the English novel was definitely established. Its entire development exhibited those tendencies guiding the age to a new spirit. The novel was the embodiment of a practical and ethical mood taking the shape of an intense realism and rejecting artificiality by a dependence upon the fundamental data of feeling. It "heralded the advent of everyday manners and common people to artistic acceptance." Fielding established the new literary medium in its more permanent form and he, with Smollett, deepened the absorption of the period in the actual life of the day, in its middle-class moral perspective. The further advance in Sterne deflected the novel away from an exclusive sociological reflection of contemporary life. It was to ally itself with the forces of political innovation by becoming an outpouring of personality. The development of this new literary form was in harmony with the psychology of the current religious revival, so that while each seemed in substance largely antagonistic to the other, both derived their force from the same undercurrent of national life.

Appealing to a much smaller world, and subject to much larger prejudices, the popular trend was similarly evidenced in the record of the English stage. The stream of sentimental drama, with its preoccupation in personal feeling,

marks the authentic mood. Both of the two theatrical innovations of the age were bent to the popular mind. The pantomime and the ballad opera catered frankly to a taste which might have been vulgar but was certainly the world of the common man.

All of these developments were correlated with an amazing extension of the habit of reading, throughout the country and extending through all ranks of society. Pamphlet literature of all sorts, tracts, and such popular literature as the chapbooks, combined with periodicals, poetry, the novel and the stage to exhibit the wide scope of the country's awakening. The thirst of the poor for the ability to read which amazed workers at the end of the century was only partly the product of the revival's exaltation of Bible reading. Through the printed word the community was being knit together, its sense of social values defined, and the ability to adjust men's outlook to a society of innovation was being effectually nurtured in the process.

B. THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER III

THE BASIS OF WESLEYAN SOCIAL ETHICS

1. *The Christian Ethic*

The Christian ethic is, in essence, a social theory of individual initiative. It follows from that fact that the social teaching deriving its authority from the New Testament writings has never been a definitive and final code. Each age sought in some measure to formulate the principle in terms of its own experience. That elasticity of the Christian ethic was no mere vagary of historical expediency, but a consequence of what is very fundamental to it—a capacity for sensitive adjustment to the vital processes of a living organism. The first principle of that ethic was, in fact, never applicable to any large historical society. To trust the self-direction of the incompetent individual was to invite the negation of that socialized conduct which was imperative to the stability of any community. In this perspective, historic formulations of the Christian ethic were not unsound in seeking a compromise of the pure doctrine by admitting legalistic codes and external authority to hedge about the individual's conduct. But in doing so the development of the Christian ethic was made insensitive to change and the individual's capacity for initiative was fettered. To this extent its historical formulations discarded the original theory, since it is certainly the core of the teaching of the admittedly dependable Gospel sources that the first problem of the Christian life is to achieve a working synthesis between the seemingly opposed qualities

of individual anarchy and social harmony. Rejecting the principle of coercion in social conduct, Christian teaching undertook to provide a method to justify an unlimited reliance on personal capacity for social initiative. But this central aspect of the theory was generally rejected as too elusive for logical definition. It asserted a confidence in human nature which was plainly at variance with social experience. Nevertheless, it is a curious commentary on the selective process of reason that depravity and incapacity should have been assigned the central instead of the incidental place in the Christian system, while confidence in human competence was so largely neutralized.

The revival under Wesley was more of an ethical than a theological movement. It produced important consequences for the political and economic life. It propagated certain definite ideas and attitudes affecting secular activities, as part of its normal function. In doing this it undertook to be a real interpretation of the Christian ethic. Its representative views, however, were not abstract but were produced in the interaction of the revival forces with the whole content of the eighteenth-century English society. Divorced from that relation their significance is undiscoverable. Stated in terms of sociological analysis they were of importance beyond the narrow limits of sectarian history.

2. *Eighteenth-Century Wesleyan Ethic*

There are two general types of social philosophy. The one places its emphasis upon environing institutions, by the use of which men are to be liberated from present restraints. The other is concerned but secondarily with the external circumstances of the environment and places primary stress upon individual initiative and the psycho-

logical conditions which will guarantee that initiative for moral ends. The functional unit of the former is the social institution, while of the latter it is the mind of the individual. The two do not entirely exclude each other, it is true, but they constitute distinct types which tend to combine forces in the developed forms of social thought. Both of these types were exemplified in the most characteristic reasoning of the eighteenth century.

"Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains," was the point of departure of the philosophy of the French Revolution, stated with all the confidence of a novel discovery. "Man was free in his primitive state, but he is everywhere in bondage," was the opening proposition of a theory which commanded a far larger if more popular following, but which in its context bore less appearance of novelty. The difference in content given each of these curiously similar assumptions is the measure of a divergence between the two types of political theory. Each set for itself the aim of winning a freedom for the individual in society, but the programme of the former was to effect its end mainly by a reformation of social institutions while the latter undertook to achieve its end by a psychological transformation of individuals through which their conduct was to become infused with a social purpose.

This latter is, in substance, a bare description of the political theory of the Wesleyan revival, any uniqueness of which must be sought in its detailed application. True to its prototype, the Christian ethic, it was definitely a religious ethic. It is true, as Leslie Stephen declared, that the Methodist movement was essentially moral and philanthropic, but it was cast in a theological mould. Its ethic was embodied in principles of a definitely religious sort, even though its claim to validity was grounded on

the concrete data of experience. Wesleyanism must therefore be appraised first as a religious theory of social structure and social process. The ideas around which it centred its propaganda were couched in the phrases of Christian literature. It sought explicitly to disclaim any revolutionary intention in doctrine. In matters of religion, affirmed its most representative spokesman, "I am for as few innovations as possible."[1] It thus ranged itself ostensibly with the conservative forces of tradition. On the other hand, it is equally true that the movement's leaders did not realize how completely the combination of their method and the particular emphasis of their teaching made the project a fresh enterprise in contemporary society. The doctrines upon which the programme of the revival was built were few and always concretely applied. They were concerned, first, with the nature of man, as he once was, as he is and as he may be, and secondly, with the technique of this process. It is this fact that it concentrated upon the problem of how to change men that justifies the claim that the revival was a moral rather than a theological movement. "I find more profit in sermons on either good tempers, or good works, than in what are vulgarly called 'Gospel Sermons,'" said Wesley. "The term has now become a mere cant word: I wish none of our society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ, or his blood, or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine Gospel sermon!' We know no Gospel without salvation from sin."[2] 'The

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 438. The edition from which this and subsequent references are taken is: *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872.

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xiii., p. 36.

unique genius of the religious awakening was to effect a new moral status for the individual in his social relationships, and it prescribed a method the effectiveness of which measured the soundness of its insight. The denial of this interpretation of its character rests upon the opinion that the teaching broadcast was focussed upon other-worldly interests, important for the present only in the relation of a means to an end. This a careful scrutiny of the records fails to uphold. In circumstances of distress and thwarted aspiration it is human to seek encouragement in a roseate hope of the future. This condition was aptly descriptive of many to whom the messages of the revival came. Nevertheless, no exclusively other-worldly emphasis dominated the early Wesleyan societies. Leaders and Conference declared against such a distortion [1] and the secular record of Wesleyans is a final refutation of the charge. It is true that a different attitude was subsequently pushed to the front. Moreover, an other-worldly emphasis was the more common outlook of other sections of the revival. This divergence in attitude among the various revival groups doubtless followed from a fundamental difference in the bias of leaders.[2] The other-worldly individualism for which Wesleyanism has often been stigmatized was, in fact, not so characteristic as an individualism of present interest with an emphatic social emphasis. "Christianity is essentially a social religion; and . . . to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it" [3] was the persistent mood of the movement. The content of this empirical interest will be made clear by

[1] E.g., *Publications of Wesley Historical Society*, 1896, p. 22; John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. i., p. 139; *Works*, vol. viii., p. 297; Samuel Warner, *Memoirs and Select Letters of Mrs Anne Warner*, p. 15.

[2] *Cf.* Chapter VIII.

[3] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 296.

the manner in which Wesleyan leaders undertook to apply their doctrines concretely to current social problems.

There were two articles of the revival's teaching which, in their implications, sum up its social-religious theory. Incidentally these two doctrines have much in common with contemporary social and political thinking issuing from other sources than the religious awakening, and they suggest a basis for a comparative criticism of the practical value of Wesley's ideas and the political theories of men so varied as Locke, Shaftesbury, Bentham and Godwin. The doctrines of chief importance alike for the religious and sociological significance of Wesleyanism were (1) the character of man's primitive and present nature and (2) the theory of perfectionism. Around these two practically all of the revival teaching revolved, and in the printed sermons and records which survive they bulk larger than all of the remainder. The first represents the point of departure, the second the goal, while religious processes bridge the distance between.

There was a twofold source to which both of these doctrines were traced by Wesley, and Wesley so completely dominated the movement during his lifetime that his position was authoritative. The Bible was, of course, the final and adequate source of authority, although in fairness it should be remembered that a slavish literalism was avoided by interpreting the written record in the light of a penetrating scrutiny of common sense. It is a mark of the degree to which the revival was an integral part of the rationalistic contemporary mind that it made a constant appeal to reason in experience as a twin ground with the Scripture in matters of belief.

3. *The Theory of Diseased Will*

There was no conscious departure from tradition in the theory of man's virginal and present nature. With the non-religious thinkers, Wesley joined in idealizing the primitive life of humankind, but, unlike other social theorists, he found an explanation of the disparity between the observed state of man and this dream of an ideal past in the individual's failure and not in social institutions. "Man was made right." At that time "all the faculties and powers of his soul" conformed "to the moral law." This implied that: "First. His understanding was a lamp of light. . . . Secondly. His will lay straight with the will of God. . . . Thirdly. His affections were regular, pure and holy."[1] Moral law was thus merely the normal expression of the nature of things in man's natural condition. Man had come to live in an unnatural condition. His reason had been clouded, his will corrupted, and his affections distorted. The problem was one of restoration. In its present context, the more or less familiar tradition constituted a serious approach to social problems which were insistently urgent. "Passion and prejudice govern the world," wrote Wesley to a friend, "only under the name of reason. It is our part, by religion and reason joined, to counteract them all we can."[2] To that end the first problem was to find a technique of altering human character. This, it may be suggested, was at once its strength and its defect, as it had before been the strength and defect of interpretations of the Christian ethic. The genius of the Christian conception has rightly been discerned to be spiritual as opposed to codified legalism,

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. ix., pp. 434-435.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xii., p. 412.

inward as opposed to external rules, and freedom as opposed to coercion. Hence in its emphasis upon the primacy of individual character it has always been in danger of failing to stress adequately the necessity of not only socializing the will, but also canalizing its activities through efficient social organization. This defect was imposed upon Wesleyanism with special force by the accident of historical circumstances, which tended to disparage the usefulness of organized institutions and yet, at the same time, to brand any open attempt at social innovation as disreputable. Nevertheless, Wesley's genius for organization and his social emphasis made a genuine if secondary interest in questions of environment inescapable.

This axiom of the revival did not, however, represent merely a theological judgment. The period which produced Butler and Wesley in religion, Hume in morals, and Bentham and Burke in politics, could hardly be accused of absorption in abstract theory to the neglect of a search for practical solutions. Contemporary society was experiencing the pains of transition from old to new forms, with all the maladjustments of a complex community unorganized to facilitate the process. Those bulwarks of earlier social control, effective in a society of more definitely recognized obligations and privileges, were fast disappearing, and before the close of the preceding century organized but futile attempts had been made to stem the tide of public and individual instability. It was because he recognized these disagreeable facts that Butler was a more acute observer than Shaftesbury. To this condition of things Wesley was most sensitive. "Wherever I have been," he wrote in 1773, when he had probably travelled over more of the country than

any contemporary, "I have found the bulk of mankind, Christian as well as Heathen, deplorably ignorant, vicious and miserable."[1] "I know both from Scripture, reason, and experience, that his picture of man is not drawn from life. It is not true, that no man is capable of malice, or delight in giving pain; much less, that every man is virtuous, and remains so as long as he lives," he retorted to the impressions he gained from reading Hutcheson's *Essay on the Passions*.[2] In the eighteenth century, human depravity represented an empirical judgment. Wesley defended his opinion not only from Scripture, but by an appeal to history, contemporary social and moral degradation, unmoralized economic processes, and adduced war as inconceivable except as an evidence of the corruption of the human will and mind.

The simplified solution to the problem of social disease appeared therefore, in essence, a reference to the individual will. To correct the diseased and morally weak condition of the will meant that the remainder of the problems of social improvement would follow in orderly solution. The dominant interest of the age was in practical measures, and the dogma of the defective will was no more a speculative assumption than it was a leverage to the process of moral transformation. Certainly the doctrine was no more fantastic than the psychological insight of Wesley's contemporaries in social theory who went to the opposite extreme. Both were inadequate interpretations of experience, and the former squared more nearly with the facts.

The thesis itself did not necessarily imply a low estimate of the individual. On the contrary, it assumed

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 478.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. iii., p. 485.

the opposite. "To describe human nature as deeply fallen, as far removed both from virtue and wisdom, does not argue that we despise it,"[1] declared the movement's leader. It was rather a declaration of faith in human capacity. Incidentally, this very dogma was probably the source of more genuine democratic social feeling than any other conception of wide currency, for it placed rich and poor, high and low, on a level in their equality of need and worth. Critics from the higher social groups complained that this hateful doctrine degraded them to the disgusting level of the common herd.

4. *The Theory of Perfectionism*

The conception of the diseased will, however, was no more than the point of departure. The significance of the theory, either as a reasoned social ethic or as a project in religious psychology, has been distorted by making human depravity more than that. The validity of a more central feature of the movement's social theory was no more bound up with the historical form of the defective-will assumption than Locke's theory of consent was dependent upon the invulnerability of contract as an historical event. The myth was incidental. The substance was "a religion evidently founded on, and every way agreeable to, eternal reason, to the essential nature of things. Its foundation stands on the nature of God and the nature of man, together with their mutual relations."[2] The main proposition of the Wesleyan theory was the doctrine of perfectibility. Wesley, at the close of his career, wrote to a Methodist preacher: "This doctrine is the grand

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. ix., p. 327.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 12.

depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up."[1] He claimed that Methodism prospered wherever the doctrine was seriously taught.[2]

Perfectionism was a conception concerned with the potential capacity of man. It constituted the summit of the revival's interpretation of the Christian ethic, up to which everything else led. Yet it was an extremely practical doctrine. It affirmed a confidence in the possibilities of human nature which, in its sober grasp of realities, was in marked contrast to the superficial optimism of Shaftesbury or to the pretensions of the doctrinaire ideals of Godwin. Perplexing to the uninitiated, it was regarded as a workable remedy for social disease, and, although it was explained in terms of religious dogma, the validity of the position was persistently held up to the test of its empirical results.

Initially, as has been suggested, it held that men lived in a primitive state of nature which was not, as with Rousseau, primarily a type of social organization, but rather, like Locke, an order in which reason directed conduct to ideal ends. This early state of moral perfection under the reign of reason meant, for the proponents of the view, merely that the law of reason, the moral law and the spiritual law of Christianity were really identical. By reason was signified "the eternal reason, or the nature of things; the nature of God, and the nature of man, with the relations necessarily subsisting between them."[3] Man

[1] George Eayrs, *Letters of John Wesley*, p. 173.

[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 73. This and subsequent references are taken from Nehemiah Curnock, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*.

[3] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 12.

ruled himself by reason; reason revealed to him the moral law which was an empirical body of knowledge, and, above all, he possessed a will so completely master of itself that it was capable of ordering conduct rationally. This was definite, concise and intelligible. Its concreteness made it admirably fitted to propagate the positive doctrine of perfectionism. It is clear that the constructive ideas of the theory could have been advanced quite independently of this backward look. Nevertheless, the assumption of a primitive perfection helped to make the present programme credible, and gave it vitality in the same way that the assumption of the state of nature was important to contemporary political theory. It made the programme plausible. If the golden age existed once, it might be recovered. It was lost through a psychological process, resulting in the impairment of will and the clouding of reason. It seemed clear, then, that the problem was to effect a restoration and reinvigoration of the will and reason. Hence, said Wesley, defining the character of the process through which men must pass, "I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity."[1] It was a solution in terms of religious psychology.

In this, nevertheless, the isolated man was not allowed to dominate the picture. The individual was treated as the radial point in the community. It was explicitly affirmed that when the problem of the individual had been solved in practice, the remainder of the problems of social well-being would find their solution as a direct consequence of the reorientation of the individual life.

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 47.

This social emphasis is not an afterthought. How definitely social ends were to be served and how adequate a solution this method was felt to be it would be difficult to over-emphasize. This, declared Wesley in a public pamphlet, "we believe to be the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness going hand in hand."[1]

The content of the doctrine may be summarized briefly. It was a moral theory, deriving its vitality from its association with religious processes. This relation has obscured its significance, since the over-familiar passes as irrelevant. Here it will be sufficient, first, to point out the extent of the doctrine's application in order to exclude that to which it made no pretension, secondly, to indicate the substance of its claim, and finally, to notice the character of the process upon which its application depended.

The ambiguous term "perfection" has always been a source of misunderstanding and offence when applied to human achievement. Contemporary critics were not slow to seize the word, assume that it meant what it nakedly implied and then turn with scorn upon a movement of insane idealism so completely out of touch with life. The doctrine of human corruption appeared more congruous in the eyes of men familiar with eighteenth-century society. One may seek in vain in the vast quantity of anti-revival literature for any frontal attack on the doctrine of corruption, but the theory of perfectionism called forth the bitterest sarcasm. The champions of the doctrine were labelled impracticable dreamers and

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 3.

ridiculed for setting a standard so high that it could only result in discouraging the credulous. Wesley replied that the doctrine had been stated in the plainest terms in Scripture, but that, in any event, it had been so fully demonstrated in practice that its case could safely be rested upon the verification of experience. The misunderstanding was aggravated by uncritical assumptions about the doctrine. Hence Wesley himself undertook to define and explain the content of the position.

First, it did not imply perfection in the possession of knowledge. It was not necessary that one have encyclopædic or even accurate information. The mental state to which perfection applied was an affective and conative experience, having a relatively permanent quality. It was a description of character organized around an habitual disposition. Since it was in no sense an experience dependent upon educational acquirements, it was within the reach of all kinds and classes of men. The individual in a humble situation even possessed a distinct advantage, it was felt, because he had less bias and fewer prejudices to unlearn. In this emphasis upon experience is found the one pre-eminent point in the whole revival teaching. The fact that the possession of this "experience" was not inconsistent with considerable differences in opinion demonstrates the intensely practical nature of the movement. "We break with no man for his opinion," explained Wesley, because the emphasis of the teaching was "not points of opinion, but of practice."[1] With due allowance for pardonable exaggeration the revival did adopt a remarkable degree of tolerance towards other forms of creedal statement. It was certainly this experiential emphasis which accounts for the ease with which it in-

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iii., p. 178.

fused its revivifying energy into both the Establishment and the various dissenting groups.

The theory did not, in the second place, refer to physical perfection or freedom from those bodily influences which affect conduct. A thoroughly common-sense view was adopted toward the consequences of physical infirmities, for which one could not be held responsible. Perfectionism remained a matter of the moral life.

To define the positive content of the experience presented little difficulty. It was "a restoration of the soul to its primitive health," [1] and this was, in turn, the moral image of God. Understood theoretically as a moral transformation of character, it was in actual practice a psychological process in which the hitherto unintegrated affective and conational life was unified around a single object capable of inspiring complete and continuous loyalty. In this experience the individual was to achieve freedom from former immoral tendencies and anti-social feelings while the will was unified and energized. The result was a dominant attitude, a "holy temper," which Wesley denominated "that habitual disposition." [2] That habitual disposition was further described as love, the inseparably linked "love of God and of our neighbour, the image of God stamped on the heart." [3] "These contain the whole of Christian perfection." [4]

The noteworthy feature of the position was not the mere reiteration of a familiar and vaguely meaningful teaching of the Christian ethic, but the incessant insistence upon it and concreteness given to it by the early

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 47.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 367.
[3] George Eayrs, *Letters of John Wesley*, p. 299.
[4] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., p. 413.

forces of the revival. It became a doctrine vivid with the sense of reality, capable of making an appeal to the most diverse sorts of men, because it satisfied a felt need and was flexible enough to vary in accordance with the content of individual experience. The practical and present-worldly character of this teaching was established by the two tests defined for the possession of the experience of perfectionism. First, its realization produced a sense of inner harmony, an inward assurance, the mark of integrated character; and, secondly, one's outward conduct was directed to social ends, for its controlling principle was to be an habitual disposition of communal friendliness—not confined to any sect or group, but as wide as the community. The philanthropic record of the movement is one verification of this normal quality of the revival experience.

The real strength, then, of this body of thought was that to its theory that social welfare is dependent upon individual character it added a technique, a method, to assist in the formation of that character. It is no exaggeration to claim for the movement the aim of socializing the individual disposition. The end sought was of dominant importance; all else was held to be subservient to the defined result. It was an expansive and adaptable conception. Beyond the psychological state, the habitual inward disposition and moral character, perfectionism was not subject to more mechanical delimitation. It was essentially a living, vitalistic principle, and its precise content varied with the experience and development of every individual, and even within the life of the individual. It is here more indubitably than at any other point that the revival's interpretation squares with the central theme of the Christian ethic. The remaining details of the theory

merely testify to an attempt to make the conception a working doctrine.

The Wesleyan social theory was thus an ethic with a theological basis, but it was mainly concerned with psychological processes. In presenting an ideal moral life to the individual — an ideal said to be too exalted for human attainment—it undertook to exchange the sense of human impotence for unlimited strength. It began by stressing man's weakness and unnatural corruption, but assured him that if he relied in confidence on divine power a change in his nature would occur; and that if he continued to live in divine, not his own, strength, making the divine purpose the central loyalty of his life, a complete restoration to a pure moral nature free from tendencies to evil would be achieved. The sufficient test of this achievement was further defined as the habitual disposition to love that expresses itself in service to the common welfare. But throughout, the significant point of its religious psychology is the rejection of human moral weakness as an unnatural and acquired disability. Nothing could be invented better suited to make men conscious of their significance, and its effect upon a population which the prevailing social system burdened with a sense of inferiority would be revolutionary.

This was the theoretical basis of the Wesleyan movement as a system of social ethics. The bearing of the revival upon the process of moulding and vitalizing a new system of social values depended upon the application of these conceptions to the social relations of secular life. What contribution did the movement make to the development of philanthropic enterprise? What attitude did it adopt towards the activities of the economic life from which men's civic standing was so largely derived?

What support did it give to the trends towards political liberalism? It is in answers to these questions that there is to be discovered the place of Wesleyanism in the process which hewed out a new status for the individual as a civic personality.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL TRENDS IN THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT

A POPULAR movement in which a compelling ethical interest supplanted formal religion was certain to produce striking social effects. It has been taken for granted, however, that in politics Wesleyan Methodism was either a slavish servant of the conservative mind or a political vacuity. This judgment overlooked a revealing experiment in political reasoning, for the movement propagated a series of political ideas which exercised a noteworthy influence within the Methodist body and through its members on the entire community. This indifference to the value of the political contribution of Wesleyanism has been due to several circumstances. The direction in which the movement later developed tended to obliterate its original uniqueness, and it was natural to assess its entire significance in the light of its later record. The movement's ideas have also been unintentionally obscured by a proneness to read into the eighteenth-century attitude those assumptions respecting the functions and nature of the State which have subsequently matured, to become a part of current thought. In any event, it remains that a representative theory of society, derived from an impressive tradition, was embodied in the movement, and that its political judgments were formulated with considerable detail. It need not have displayed creative originality to have been historically significant. It is enough that an important political attitude was made

articulate in the life of the societies. Its statement contributes something to clarify the subsequent development of Methodism in relation to the organized community.

1. *The Origin and Nature of Civil Power*

The form which any political theory was to assume in the eighteenth century would, of necessity, be moulded in the atmosphere of those influences which flowed from Locke. With the essays on Toleration and Civil Government the leaders of the revival were acquainted. Representative political judgments which the eighteenth century traced to Locke they saw to be in harmony with their own temper and views. They were therefore quick to voice gratefully their approval of ideas which carried the mark of respectability. But with some of the convenient and plausible fictions which were advanced to support the main points of Locke's position they found themselves in an irreconcilable conflict. This was emphatically the case when certain of Locke's lineal descendants, contemporary with the revival, discovered in those fictions revolutionary deductions which Locke himself had vaguely, if at all, realized and would certainly have disapproved.

The issue was joined at the outset by a really important distinction illustrated in writers like Price, derived from Locke. It relates to the origin and nature of civil authority. The position of each group measures the extent of the divergence between two radically different modes of political reasoning. The difference is defined at this point: the long series of theorists which led up to and then followed Locke argued from the origin of political power to its nature; the tradition which the Wesleyans exemplify argued from the nature of civil power to its origin. The

former deduced a view of the state from its supposed history. The latter built its theory of society upon assumptions and then turned to experience for verification. The Wesleyan position was, in fact, a metaphysical theory of the state. Both types drew upon historical fictions whenever their plausibility made such arguments useful. It was this initial approach that led to the development of two mature theories of government as the logical consequence of the initial assumption. Both claimed as their aim the highest present welfare of the entire community. Conceptions of the nature and origin of the civil power dictated differing attitudes in respect to the manner in which such benefits could be best secured.

The work of Locke's successors was, first, to divorce political speculation from a defence of abstract rights and mythical assumptions, and, secondly, to focus attention upon sheer utility as the explicit ground of political processes. This was bound to undercut the doctrine of consent as an abstract political right, even though in time it led to a rediscovery of that principle as an indispensable political method. That development reached its full expression in the mature reasoning of philosophical radicalism. But the first generation of radicals who were contemporary with Wesley had not learned to dispense with Locke, while they had gone beyond him in acknowledging some of the equalitarian implications of his reasoning. Indeed, Priestley had so far adopted the new approach that his position would stand, shorn of its metaphysics, as soundly utilitarian. The reasoned thought of such early radicals as Cartwright, Jebb, Priestley and Price, however, started from the assumption that the franchise was a personal right and defended their position mainly with phrases derived from the tradition of Locke and the French political

writers. "Civil government, as far as it can be demonstrated free," said Price, "is the creature of the people. It originates with them,"[1] and "they have power to model [it] as they please."[2] This follows, in the words of Priestley, from the maxim "than which nothing is more true, than that every Government, in its original principles and antecedent to its present form, is an equal republic."[3] Thus the principle of consent was the proposition with which the first generation of radicals set out to criticize existing institutions. In doing so they provoked a reasoned formulation of the political attitude of the Wesleyan leaders. The fiction which built its affirmation of political power on either an historical or a postulated consent of individual men, actuated by self-interest, called forth the most vigorous criticism and denial from Wesley and his lieutenants on the grounds, first, that in fact it was false, and secondly, which was more important, that it was immoral in its conception and consequences.

It was unnecessary, after Hume, to slay again the argument derived from the alleged historicity of any agreement in which the state was born. No important instance can be cited, said Wesley, to prove that "there ever existed any original compact."[4] Certainly the Revolution of 1688, which had been advanced as an instance in point, was a lame reference, for that seminal achievement was "not [of] the people . . . no, nor even the Parliament," but "a few hundred Lords and gentlemen" who took matters into their own hands in a time of emergency.[5]

The more defensible form of the argument which ignored

[1] Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*, p. 6.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[3] Joseph Priestley, *Essay on First Principles of Government*, p. 40.
[4] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 97.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the historical compact and attempted to prove instead that the people were actually the present source of civil power was likewise met by a scornful denial of what seemed, on the face of it, a preposterous distortion of fact. If it were true, "why then," asked Wesley, "should not every man, woman and child, have a voice in placing their governors?" [1] Moderate radicals like Price and Priestley were confronted by a dilemma in defending their doctrine of consent while also agreeing to a restricted electorate determined by a property qualification. "By what right do you exclude a man from being one of the people because he has not forty shillings a year, yea, or not a groat?" they were therefore asked. "Is he not a man, whether he be rich or poor?" [2] In strict logic the question was unanswerable except by those radicals who were prepared to crusade for full manhood suffrage. But to argue for the radical doctrine and then bar out all but a few selected persons in the community was to justify Wesley's retort that "the poor pittance that remains, by I know not what figure of speech, you call the people of England." [2] When the people meant "scarce a tenth part of them," it seemed indisputable that to talk about the will of the people as the source of political authority was "mere political cant," and had no bearing on the existent situation.

It would be difficult to determine how far the attitude of Wesleyanism in its political aspects was dictated by sheer expediency or the prejudices of its leaders. Personal bias of background and a natural jealousy for the prestige and respectability of the movement's programme would probably have been wholly adequate to commit them to an intense opposition to the radical tenets. On the other

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 48.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

hand, they were gifted with a very keen sense of the practicable and were not without penetration in assessing the limits of prevailing political capacity. Nevertheless, over against every other consideration was an important orientating fact which was undeniably potent in shaping the outlook of the movement in its political phases. That was the positive doctrine, derived, it was held, from the Christian ethic. From first to last the apologetic of the Wesleyanism of the eighteenth century was ethical and its whole programme was formulated in moral terms. There was no exception made in its politics, however shackled by bias and bibliolatry the leaders of the movement were in making the detailed application. From this source, then, there was derived a more serious indictment of the theory of consent than its appeal to untenable arguments of fact. The theory of consent conceived of civil power as in its nature merely a form of co-operative prudence, with its source located in the wills of unmoralized individuals. It sought to sanctify the principle of self-interest. It seemed to introduce irresponsible chaos into the social structure. The revival was a religious movement, but it was at this period predominantly concerned with a moral purpose, and it was on the ground of its immoral consequences that the doctrine of consent aroused the greatest opposition from the Wesleyan forces. The attempt to formulate a refutation of that doctrine led to a characteristic restatement of the nature of the organized community and its functions.

The two assumptions inherent in all that follows, which distinguish the Wesleyan attitude from the current theory of consent, are, the premise that because of its very nature political power must not be associated with what men desire but what they ought to desire, and, that there exists

no inherent right of government independent of its ethical function. If it had been possible to go on from this point to a logical conclusion, the movement could have made a genuine contribution to the history of political theory. But so direct a course could not hope to satisfy diverging interests which demanded reconciliation.

What, then, is the nature of civil authority, according to the revival's leaders? This form of the question was usually assumed to be identical with the query, What ought to be the nature of political power? It is first, of its essence, that it be identified with a moral purpose. Whatever speculative or prescriptive grounds may be advanced for those who possess the power to govern, the general welfare is its indispensable justification. "The right to possess power," explained a later champion of the view, "is purely conventional, and must be modified by the end for which all government is instituted—the good of the governed."[1] It seemed undeniable that, this being true, the theory that political power could be identified with the prudential claims of self-interest was, on the face of it, indefensible. A man has "no right at all to be independent, or governed only by himself,"[2] declared Wesley. "To be guided by one's own will is freedom; to be guided by the will of another is slavery," wrote Richard Price. "It is," retorted Wesley, "if we allow your definition of freedom," but that would be "to beg the question," for only by a vicious perversion could freedom be defined as the individual's ability to pursue his own irresponsible course in society. That "is the very quintessence of republicanism," which is a theory of chaos

[1] George Cubitt, *Strictures on Mr O'Connell's Letters to the Wesleyan Methodists*, pp. 14-15.

[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 97.

rather than political organization. "In the general sense of mankind," said Wesley, "a free man" is he that is "governed, not by himself, but the laws."[1] Even that definition, however, fails to do justice to the fundamental objection to identifying self-government with freedom. If guidance by one's undisciplined will is the essence of freedom, "how free are all the devils in hell, seeing they are all guided by their own will! And what slaves are all the angels in heaven, since they are all guided by the will of another!"[2] A man is really free only when he obeys the moral law, derived from the nature of things, and that is another way of saying that freedom consists in fulfilling God's purpose for men. The evidence for this is discovered in experience, it was pointed out. Man is not an isolated unit but a part of something greater than himself, outside of which he possesses no defensible claims. Nothing is more fundamental to the whole point of view than Wesley's retort to the proposition that every man had an inherent and inalienable right to dispose of his own life according to his own choice. The entire assumption was apparently a defence of social irresponsibility. It contradicted both fact and Christian teaching by isolating the individual from the relationships his very nature imposes upon him. Human life can be defined only as a trust for the execution of a moral purpose. Therefore, it was explained, it is totally misleading to say that one man cannot dispose of another's life except with the latter's consent. "No man has a right to dispose of his own life."[3] Only God has that right. This is the keynote of the Wesleyan view. Authority in

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 97.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the state is not basically different from authority in religion, because both are moral in their nature. It is for this reason that "it is as absurd to say, that government is the creature of the people, as to maintain, that religion and marriage are the creatures of the people," replied John Fletcher (1729-1785) to the declaration that Government was prudential in its nature and secular in its origin. For the source of authority in the state one must go beyond human prudence to the source of moral authority. Hence, "in full opposition to this doctrine," of popular initiative as the creator of the state, continued Fletcher, "I assert that Government is the creature of God."[1] Thus, its ethical character leads to the conclusion that civil power could not have originated in unmoralized human will, but must be traced to the divine will. Here was a reasoned protest, supporting bias, against the implications of the irresponsible individualism of the prudential theory. It was a plain insistence upon the supremacy of an ethical standard. Confusion arose when the attempt was made to identify moral authority in the community with actual authority.

For this intense interest of the revival in the moral nature and origin of Government was coupled with and often seemed derived from a theological dogma without moral implications. The confusion was rooted securely in tradition. It followed from an insistence upon identifying what ought to be with what is, and then answering the obvious contradiction in fact by an appeal to an inscrutable and metaphysical power external to the minds of men. In fairness to the writers who formulated the political theory of the revival it must be admitted that they inherited these two distinct strains from authoritative sources in the

[1] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted with Reason, Scripture, and the Constitution*, p. 58.

Christian tradition. The one was distinctly moral, and is of the essence of the Christian ethic. The other was that incongruously joined element derived initially from apocalyptic sources and elevated into a dogma of speculative theology by Paul — a particular doctrine of the divine government of the world. It possessed, in itself, no necessarily ethical implications. In practice, its application usually lay outside the field of ethics. Christian thinkers who found it in the tradition, being compelled to find a place for it, sometimes rationalized it by merely affirming the moral purpose of the divine prescription. In the eighteenth century, in any event, another alternative to the consent doctrine, with its assertion of political origins in the unmoralized will of the individual, was at hand in this traditional accretion of the Christian ethic. The attempt of the early Christian community to apply their doctrine under the transient circumstances of a persecuting political power produced a strong precedent which, whatever its value in survival for the struggling primitive community, possessed a measure of expediency in eighteenth-century England tending to promote its acceptance. The Pauline dogma of a divine prescription of existing powers effectually determined that what might have been exclusively an ethical conception of authority was to be neutralized by attempting to treat it as ethical and metaphysical at the same time. Government not only ought to be but, wrote Wesley, is " a delegation, namely, from God : for, rulers are God's ministers, or delegates." [1] This was, in effect, to remove political authority beyond the moral judgment of the only agents capable of applying the moral criterion. It affirmed, at least, that the possession of governing power was itself a *prima facie* evidence

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 105.

of its moral justification, and that was, in practice, to cancel the moral element entirely. By an appeal to the assumed moral but inscrutable purpose of God, obscurantism was called in to sanctify the continuance of existing might.

Here, then, were these two divergent points of view, unnaturally linked together in the Wesleyan attitude. To trace the influence of each of them would be to chart the entire political record of the movement. The moral emphasis was certainly never wholly forgotten, but the circumstances ever brought into the foreground the theological conception which normally demanded an acquiescence in the *status quo*. "I believe 'there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God' (Rom. xiii. 1). There is no subordinate power in any nation, but what is derived from the superior power therein," and all from God.[1] This statement from Wesley became a standard article of Methodist belief, invested with creedal force.

At the point where it passes over from an ethical to a theological basis it is evident that the attitude displays the temper of Calvinism. The Wesleyan movement was, in fact, much closer to the mood of Calvinism than the open conflict in respect to the doctrine of election suggests. At that point the Arminian theory broke completely with Genevan dogma by the assertion of universal opportunity to salvation. But otherwise the line of demarcation between the tempers of these two sections of the Protestant tradition is very difficult to locate—a fact to which Wesley himself called attention.[2] Both the moral emphasis and a belief in an inscrutable Providence are necessary to account for the strength of the movement's political

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., pp. 47-48.
[2] *Idem*, *Journals*, vol. iii., pp. 84-86.

convictions. Hence, the judgment that civil power in nations differs in "various places, according to the providence of God, who has disposed it in such an order as shall be best for the people, for whose sake he has established Magistracy in all its forms."[1] Here was ample ground upon which to oppose those influences that were striving for political change. Representative Wesleyans, especially of the second generation, attacked the new theories with all the enthusiasm provoked by a heresy. The religious grounds for political loyalty infused violent emotions into political opinions. In the official publication of the movement an unnamed writer, presumably John Wesley, phrased with graphic intensity this union of theology and ethics. He excoriated the advocates of doctrines which only by a perversion of meaning could be called "civil liberty" and "political rights." They were adjudged guilty of divine treason as "Christen'd Heathens" raging

> Against the Lord Most High,
> Against his dread Vicegerent here
> Cast off the yoke of loyal fear
> And God himself defy.[2]

The grounds of so violent a doctrine are made clearer by the detailed application of these initial assumptions.

2. *The Fallacy of Government by Representation*

The bearing of such an account of political origins on the relation of the individual member of a society to its processes of government is evident. No claim to a political

[1] Henry Moore, *Fear God: Honour the King*, p. 11.
[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. iii., p. 677, December 1780.

right could be justified which fails to square with both the ethical and theological principles from which there seemed to be no escape. Similarly, any given government must be assessed in the light of those assumptions. The very contradictions within that double measure made the test an exceedingly flexible one. In the attempt to reconcile these two ruling postulates, the inconsistency of which was vaguely sensed, Wesleyan leaders who were sincerely reasoning about the state were led to grope towards a functional view of civil institutions. They insisted unequivocally that social forms could be justified only by the ultimate welfare of the governed, but, confronted with an intimately realized divinity which gave meaning to even the minutest detail of their lives, they were forced to add that, however inexplicable in the immediate view, a force outside the deliberating wills of men was co-operating to secure that beneficent end. The tradition made such an outlook necessary; familiar experience made the view feel natural. Men who were unaware of any natural selection process in history were yet prepared to maintain that the form of government possessed by any social group must ordinarily be the one best adapted to serve the welfare of that particular community. This was not, of course, the prescription of social experience, as with Burke, but an imposed prescription of a divine but moral purpose. This genuine conviction of the inherent character of social institutions explains how that attitude was not sheer bibliolatry or opportunism which exalted the English form of government, while adding, "Whoever is born in England, France or Holland, is subject to their respective governors; and must needs be subject to the power, as to the ordinance of God," not only for fear of the consequences of disobedience, but as a religious obligation,

because one must assume that the form of any existing government has been ordered by Providence in such a way " as shall be best for the people."

It was possible, of course, that it might not in fact be " best for the people," and the prospect of that eventuality was not ignored. In the present context, however, the thesis that " Sovereigns have a right of ruling their subjects for good, independently on (*sic*) the will of the people," [1] represented the reasoned attitude of the movement towards the alleged right of the individual to participate in the affairs of government. The existence of such a right was denied, either on grounds of theoretical justification or even, in fact, of expediency. Wesley's *Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs* aroused the criticism in 1771 that " a more pernicious doctrine can scarcely be advanced in a free state than this: that the people at large should not meddle with affairs of government " [2]; but it was an accurate representation of the Wesleyan view. One of the later apologists of the group phrased it even more baldly: " The mass of the people, as a modern statesman observed, have nothing to do with the laws but obey them. Government arising from the people is a chimera." [3]

It would, however, be unfair to overlook the fact that the radical doctrine was not thus summarily dismissed without further consideration. Insuperable bias may have weighted the scales of judgment, yet, in form at least, the principle of representative government as a practical embodiment of the personal rights implied in the doctrine

[1] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, p. 59.

[2] Anonymous, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr John Wesley; in Answer to his Late Pamphlet*, p. 11. 1771.

[3] By " A Careful Observer," *Strictures on Methodism*, pp. 112-113. London, 1804.

of consent was rejected on three grounds. The first was moral, the second was practical, and the third was theological.

(1) Assuming that government is instituted for a moral end, on what ground can an individual make valid claim to a right of sharing in the conduct of public affairs when it is assumed that it is personal advantage and not the community's welfare that is the determining principle of that participation? The very statement of the radical theory was calculated to arouse repugnance in the minds of men who sought honestly to build an ethical principle into every department of life, and who found no ground for assuming that the operation of self-interest produced the welfare of all. Nothing seemed more immoral than the theory of self-centred prudence. To the mind of the revival the normal, though unnatural, state of individual character was a corruption which meant fundamentally that it was viciously selfish and thus an enemy of the true welfare of the community. That judgment was, of course, a central factor in shaping the positive political doctrine of the movement. It was one of the stated grounds of Wesley's opposition to the views of Rousseau, Voltaire and Hume, that they failed to realize the "real state men are in."[1] The appeal to popular will uninformed by social purpose could result, declared Wesley, only "to unhinge all government," and plunge society into a chaos. Thus it appeared that, in the very nature of things, general participation in government was a denial of the moral end of the state.

(2) This led to the second group of objections. The political incompetence of the people was held to be at one with their moral impotence. At no point was this group of

[1] J. W. Prince, *Wesley on Religious Education*, p. 47.

observers more certain of themselves than in the opinion that the people were incapable of political initiative. It did not for a moment occur to them to ask whether men possessed a potential capacity which, under more friendly circumstances, could be developed and wisely enlisted in the processes of government. They were content with an eminently practical judgment, based upon so general an observation that, at the time, it was held to be irrefutable. Here was the *reductio ad absurdum* of all claims for popular government. The conduct of public affairs, it was argued, must be left in the hands of those who have ability and opportunity to deal with them intelligently. Whether the right of those who actually controlled the processes of state should be conditioned by the possession of these qualifications did not suggest itself as a pertinent inquiry. The alleged popular incapacity was, in the hands of these writers, little more than a negative criticism. It was accepted as a sufficient refutation of radical claims to point to the complex problems of state, the low level of popular intelligence, the inaccessible channels of accurate public information, as well as that supreme objection, the uninformed conscience and unsocialized will. The "people" commonly meant an ignorant, passion-governed, irresponsible multitude. The early Methodists knew by painful experience how viciously susceptible was this "bawling mob"[1] to capricious and degenerate leadership, and initiators of reform were hastily classed in that category because of their associations. The *Letters of Junius* were, therefore, damned as "magic dust" thrown in the eyes of the people,[2] for vicious ends. Indeed, it was the very humanitarian outlook and purpose of Wesley which makes

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 37.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

intelligible the bitterness of his opposition to the proposal of extending political power to that "many-headed beast," the people. Such an experiment, he affirmed in reply to Dr Price, "if practised, would overturn all" the foundations of a society instituted for men's welfare.

The situation was not, in principle, altered even when the illiterate and degraded were ruled out. Politics was held to be a special province into which the average man must not venture. Although unusually well informed, Wesley declared of himself that, "I am no politician; politics lie quite out of my province." With the best possible motive, the otherwise intelligent subject was an illiterate politically. Granted a potential capacity and the guidance of a socialized will, even then it was held inexpedient to engage in politics, for "to form a tolerable judgment of" the questions with which the public authority must deal "requires, not only a good understanding, but more time than common tradesmen can spare, and better information than they can possibly procure."[1] The cogency of this last point of view is bound up with the current view of what, in fact, was included within the province of political action. A narrow conception of what constituted the scope and function of political institutions had not, as yet, been enlarged by those influences which, flowing from Montesquieu, and injected effectively into the English scene by Bentham, were to redefine the function of government as an agent of aggressive social policy. The denial of free initiative in politics did not, therefore, arouse an irritating sense deprivation.

It is relevant to trace a contributing factor in moulding the typical Wesleyan view regarding popular incompetence to participate in government, to the immediate experience

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 19.

of the Wesleyan societies. The internal organization of the movement was as effective as it was centralized. It was neither an accident nor a choice by foresight which dictated that the whole Methodist organization should be benevolently autocratic. It was the dictate of experience in the interest of effectiveness, and the larger measure of permanent success achieved by the Wesleyan section of the revival was due more to its semi-military organization than to any other single factor. "I see more and more," wrote John Wesley in 1773, that unless there is unified control, "the work can never be carried on. The body of the preachers are not united. Nor will any of them submit to the rest; so that either there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end." [1] The rank and file must also be restrained. If society members had power to place or displace the preacher, it was asked, how would he then speak an unpleasing truth? And if he did, what would become of him? [2] It was a practical judgment rather than an avowal of conservative political values which aroused the aged leader to oppose "the people having a share in the choice of 'either stewards or leaders,'" for, he testifies, "We are no republicans, and never intend to be." [3] The impossibility of making popular government workable refuted "the very principle . . . that a right of choosing his governors belongs to every partaker of human nature." [4]

One other ground for this negative attitude was doubtless the general distrust of government as a tool for use in seeking popular objectives. Even when the inequities of

[1] George Eayrs, *Letters of John Wesley*, p. 142.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 276.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. xii., p. 455.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., pp. 52-53.

the slave trade stirred Wesley to a violent condemnation, it seemed to him useless to appeal to popular will. "Should we address ourselves to the public at large?" he asked. "What effect can this have? It may inflame the world against the guilty, but is not likely to remove the guilt. Should we appeal to the English nation in general? This also is striking wide, and is never likely to procure any redress for the sore evil we complain of. As little would it in all probability avail, to apply to the Parliament."[1] At best it was felt that political organizations were clumsy, and that popular initiative could only increase their impotence.

(3) The third ground upon which Wesleyans denied that there existed any personal right to a franchise was a theological one. Yet, because the use of pure abstractions was repugnant, even this dogma was treated in a practical mood and by an appeal to experienced fact. At the outset a conviction that English civil institutions were well constituted to secure the social welfare and general happiness appeared to verify the theory of a directing Providence. The dogma of the divine ordination of existing powers was itself coupled with the notion that the working of Providence was man's assurance of a moral achievement. That alone would have in logic compelled the adoption of an inflexibly conservative view. It had been advanced, however, that the principle of the right to a voice in public affairs was, in fact, at the core of English institutions in the form of representative government. The Wesleyans emphatically rejected this. In their denial they undertook to interpret such representative institutions as were alleged to exist in terms of a moral responsibility to a providential authority, and not to the members of the community.

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 75.

The whole argument for representative forms, as the symbol of popular government, rests upon misconceptions and faulty analyses, it was averred. The source of error was twofold. First, there existed a misunderstanding of the facts of political practices and forms. Secondly, that misunderstanding followed from untenable assumptions regarding the function of the persons designated to conduct the affairs of Government and inaccurately called the representatives of the people. The explanation was simple enough. The registered consent of the people was not in fact conveyed through the existing franchise, as any frank examination of the system made clear. "What do you mean by the people?" it was asked. "All the members of a state? . . . All the individuals that compose it? . . . Will you rather say with Judge Blackstone, 'Every free agent'? or with Montesquieu, 'Every one that has a will of his own'?"[1] This obviously proved too much. Few of the acute radicals were willing to go so far. The appeal to existing fact made the argument absurd. Beyond this, however, it was denied that popular consent was even assumed in the electoral function, and the current attempt to make out a case for implied consent was waved away contemptuously as weighted casuistry.

It had to be admitted, of course, that a certain passive consent was indispensable to the stability of any organized community. Obviously the State could not function if its members refused to acquiesce. Yet, it was explained, that is merely a matter of arithmetic and authenticates no claim to a personal right. The will of the people is in this sense merely "[*causa sine qua non*] a requisite,"[2] said Fletcher. An army could not function if soldiers refused to obey

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 98.
[2] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, p. 59.

their superiors, or a minister could not preach the gospel if his congregation refused to listen to him. But as soldiers it is men's moral duty to obey and as Christians it is men's moral duty to listen to those who are accredited with a divine message. So it is the moral duty of the citizen to acquiesce in the processes of the State. The very dependence of the organized community for its existence upon that acquiescence was taken to demonstrate not the citizen's right to a voice in its government, but his obligation to support it. Hence there was only one pertinent question one might ask, and that related to the moral test which justifies political power. Even if all the members of the community did, in fact, actively participate in its political direction, that would constitute no ground for a right of the individual to make his voice effective in the deliberations of Government. At best that would be no more than a convention. It is true that these writers previously invited confusion by identifying the existing organization of government with what ought to be. With that dictum they are here inconsistent, and yet truer to their basic moral principle in denying that any existing power must in itself be identified with what ought to be. In any event, even representative institutions were held to reflect moral responsibility, not personal rights.

The current controversy relative to taxation was advanced as a case in point. The British Government has no right to tax the American colonists without their consent, insisted the champions of the resisting colonies. The influence of contemporary events as well as the opinions of Samuel Johnson caused Wesley to reconsider an earlier deduction from his principles, and he, with others, seized upon the issue as an illustration of the absurdity of the theory that premised the consent of the governed to the authority of

government. Elementary analysis reveals, it was pointed out, that the Americans are in exactly the same position as at least nine-tenths of Englishmen, whose obligation to pay taxes is not questioned because they are not accorded the privilege of casting a vote. Taxation is merely payment for benefits enjoyed as a member of the community. One pays for what one receives. Common practice implies no abstract right. Therefore taxation without representation is no tyranny. In any event, the argument was not relevant to the claim to representation as a right resident in personality. The qualifications of electors did not even imply such a right. In England the possession of property was merely an assigned convention which designated certain persons to perform the electoral function, on the assumption that the community was best served by that arrangement.

With the denial of the franchise as a personal right, however, it should be noted that these political moralists of the revival did not defend the theory of representation as a right inherent in property, authorizing its owners to seek their own advantage. The mere statement of the view devoid of moral implications was offensive. "'There is not a blade of grass in England but is represented!'" exclaimed Wesley. "This much-admired and frequently-quoted assertion is altogether new! I really thought, not the grass, or corn, or trees, but the men of England, were represented in Parliament. . . . *No blade of grass but is represented!* Pretty words!"[1] The representation of property view was an impersonal and irresponsible conception, alien to the entire mood of the revival. The franchise was not to be regarded as a vested privilege. Its distribution was no more than an expedient devised to secure the welfare

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 117.

of the community reckoned in personal terms. If it failed in this it violated the only justifiable function which its providential sanction assigned to it. In fact, this very attitude led Wesley to voice a critical view favouring parliamentary reform long before circumstances branded the reformers with ill repute. "I walked to Old Sarum, which," he wrote in 1754, "in spite of common sense, without house or inhabitant, still sends two members to the Parliament." [1] A year later he derided ironically an arrangement which permitted a small town, "near half as large as Islington," to send "four members to the Parliament! And each county in North Wales" [2] to send but one! Methodists understood the representation of property theory to mean a convenient method, hallowed by the prescription of long practice and providential guidance. The theory predicated no other metaphysical right although, like all forms of social power, the franchise so allotted was held to be essentially a moral trust which imposed unavoidable obligations.

The second criticism of the representative-government view, therefore, took the form of stating a valid theory of the function of those persons elected to governing bodies. Its blatant opportunism need not obscure the fact that it did undertake to apply throughout the initial ethical-religious principle of the nature of political authority. The position was definitive. It was denied, in substance, that so-called representatives have any direct responsibility either to the people as a whole or even to those electors who voted them into office. They have a responsibility, as have the electors whose property status qualified them to vote, but that responsibility does not issue from

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, Curnock, vol. iv., p. 100.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

any political organization. It is true an elected member of the Government is expected to constitute himself a channel of information from the group which elected him, but in the conduct of government his responsibility is not to the electorate but to the moral end for which political institutions have been established. Government "is a trust," it is explained, "but not from the people. . . . It is a delegation, namely, from God." [1] Therefore "every member of the house of commons has two characters. The first is that of representative of the commons of all the British empire in general, and of a certain borough or shire in particular. The second and nobler character of a member of parliament is that of representative of God himself. According to the former character, he is an agent of the people: but with respect to the latter, he is, in his degree, the substitute of God. According to the former capacity, he spreads before the legislature the wants or wishes of the people in general, and of his borough or shire in particular: and, according to the latter capacity, he, in his degree, makes laws, if the majority of the legislating body concurs with him." An analogy, indicating the character of civil power, makes the case clear. The author was addressing the radical dissenter, Evans: "The majority of a certain congregation of Protestants in Bristol expressed a desire to have you for their pastor, and upon this title you were ordained. But does it follow that your authority to preach the gospel ascends from your flock to you?" Hence it is clear that "members of parliament, in their capacity of legislators, are no more authorized by the people to make laws, and bound to vote according to the directions of their constituents, than you and I receive authority from our flocks

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 105.

to preach the gospel." [1] Government must be obeyed "for conscience sake," because its ministers are God's delegates,[2] and their responsibility is, in effect, to him, while the content of that responsibility is supplied by their own perception of what constitutes the community's welfare. Their function itself defines the qualifications which such delegates should ideally possess. They should be "men of sound judgment, of clear apprehension, of universal benevolence, lovers of mankind, lovers of their country, lovers of their King; men attached to no party, but simply pursuing the general good of the nation." [3] The view was as naïve as it was consistent.

This interpretation of representative institutions in terms of ethical responsibility applied with equal force, of course, to electors. The prime determinant of a voter's choice should be a candidate's moral character. Vote for "the man that loves God," advised Wesley, or, in the event that none of the candidates offered "have these fruits . . . vote for him that loves the King," on the assumption that "if he does not love the King, he cannot love God." [4] The franchise was itself a divine trust, and, although it was a function allotted through a legal convention, its real validity rested on the moral end it was established to serve. The Wilkes affair served to illustrate how ineffectively such an attitude could be applied under the given conditions. Having referred to Wilkes as "our great patriot," who "is more celebrated than . . . any private man has been in England for these thousand years," Wesley felt constrained to add, "though perhaps not so admirable in his private character." [5] When the

[1] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, p. 67.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., pp. 116-117.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 32. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

House of Commons ignored the election of Wilkes, who had been expelled previously for a moral offence, it did not occur to Wesley to criticize Parliament's arbitrary denial of the will of the electors of Middlesex. On the contrary, the action of the House was defended on the grounds that it was lawful and that Wilkes was "unqualified," while his opponent was manifestly "qualified."[1] The standard by which all political processes was to be judged was "the good of the nation." Political forms reflected no other rights. The apparent soundness of the principle obscured the necessity of finding a way to apply it. In addition, its defective definition of what was, in fact, the good of the nation, assumed the limitations of the existing political order.

On these—which they thought to be defensible—grounds the leaders of the revival, as did Burke, "rejected those two essential principles of radicalism: first, that the suffrage is a right that is natural or personal; and secondly, that a parliamentary representative is a mere delegate or mouthpiece, who should be under the strictest obligations to obey the instructions of those who had elected him."[2] Considerations based on the moral test of political institutions, practical possibility and theology, ranged the Wesleyan group officially in opposition to the reform movement.

3. *Political Rights and the Function of Government*

It is clear that the opposition between the radical doctrines of popular sovereignty and the revival's denial

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 21; Anonymous, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr John Wesley; in Answer to his Late Pamphlet*, p. 2.
[2] C. B. R. Kent, *The English Radicals*, pp. 23-24.

of those doctrines was not exclusively dictated by historical circumstances or an incurably conservative temper. There was also a genuine conflict of theory and ideas. Popular government was held to be impracticable, immoral and a rejection of divine prescription.

It was one thing, however, to reject the democratic principle and another to devise methods of translating the moral responsibility of political authority into the organization of the community. The theory of consent at its worst furnished a practical contrivance for making governing bodies accountable for their actions. The principle of self-interest, however immoral on the face of it, was capable of writing content into the conception of social welfare. Nevertheless, that political theory which accepted the Christian ethic as its premise was, in the nature of the case, committed to oppose the utilitarian axiom which predicated the prosperity of society upon the individual's service to himself. Nothing is more central to the Wesleyan revival than its insistence upon a socialized will, but its moral principle was suited neither to the general level of character nor to existing standards of social intelligence. It was too subtle to be convincing. It was deficient in incentive and it demanded a more socially sensitized perception than the principle of self-interest.

Moreover, when to the denial of the popular sovereignty on practical and moral grounds was added the dogma of the divine prescription of existing authority, the whole position became hopelessly obscure to laymen too busy for subtle distinctions. The attempt to apply both of these two incongruous principles to politics appears, on the face of it, impossible. The voice of moral authority was certain to be stifled by an uncritical identification of what ought to be with what actually exists. This was a

less serious defect, however, than it would have been if the scope and function of politics had been defined in the same inclusive terms assumed in any twentieth-century discussion.

It was at this point, however, that the apparent alliance with crass conservatism was modified. Wesleyans thought politically, but their political ideas were not deduced in the retirement of a study. They were forged by the action of a religious ethic on the anvil of contemporary social events and tendencies. Wesleyan writers were not aware that they were outlining an abstract system. They were, in the fullest sense, Englishmen of the eighteenth century. As successive occasions arose they undertook to interpret political issues in terms of the principles which, with a resurgence of the primitive Christian experience, had come to possess their entire outlook. Hence the completeness of their view was not a carefully constructed system, but the application of principles which permit of wide variation.

A partial reconciliation of the conflict between Providence and ethics had been attempted in their thought by defining Providence in terms of ethics. A much more decisive step to that end was taken in diminishing the importance of the prescriptive element by limiting the scope of government. In their assumptions of what constituted the functions of political organs, a notion of the nature of the state is discovered which greatly reduced the rôle of Providence. Government as the agent of the closely knit, industrialized state was, of course, a conception of later growth. In contemporary practice the functions of the central authority were indefinitely more restricted than in the nineteenth century and than they had been before the eighteenth century. In particular, the clear definition of social maladjustments as problems for political

solution awaited the discovery of the integrating community. The seeds which Bentham scattered were yet to lie dormant for another generation before commanding acceptance. At the same time it was an age in which only the first stirrings of a political sense were distinguishable from the general vacuity of community consciousness. The suggestion that government extend its ambit beyond clearly established frontiers met either with formidable indifference or paralysing opposition. Sharing this characteristic mind-set is the explanation of an otherwise inexplicable paradox the Wesleyans exhibited. While they displayed an amazing enthusiasm for patriotic loyalty at one point, on the other hand they evidenced a virulent distrust of political action. They joined a persistent loyalty to government in an assigned sphere to a condemnation of public authority exceeding its approved functions.

The mood of active suspicion towards political processes was therefore voiced repeatedly. The prevalent corruption of the franchise by bribery belittled politics in the eyes of Wesleyan leaders and stimulated their frequent and educative criticism. A scrupulous avoidance of even the associations of political corruption was required from members of the societies who were entitled to a vote in the election for members of Parliament. Methodist electors were urged not to engage in the disgusting displays of party conflict, interpreted solely as incitements to civil disorder, fomented by politicians for selfish purposes. Nothing could better reveal the poverty of Wesley's political insight than his view of what constituted the political duty of electors. There was no suspicion that in the friction of men and events an effective instrument of social welfare was being shaped in the rise of party government. The elector's duty was set forth as a simple

moral one. Avoiding all party affiliation, he should cast his vote for the candidate who possessed the moral qualifications to govern, because by this method God's delegates were to be designated. Beyond this moral duty it is not suggested that the elector had a further duty to be intelligent. He was to eschew politics as contaminating. As for the mass of the people who did not possess the franchise, the strictest avoidance of even a political interest was vigorously commended. It was in the new contacts of the towns and populous sections to which people were migrating that there arose widened interest and political discussions were stimulated, but that important educative process only stirred Wesley to write admiringly of the "country places . . . where they know little and talk little about politics."[1] The people were incompetent in political matters and therefore, recorded the Conference minutes, "it behooves us to be silent." Political agitation, in the eyes of the leaders of the societies, was synonymous with vicious disorderliness. It also caused disruption within the societies, distracting society members from the organization's religious and philanthropic programmes—a fact that contributed further to deepen official disapproval of political interests.

Coupled with the conviction that the average man was incompetent to participate in the active direction of civic affairs, there existed a positive feeling that Government was apt to be, and often proved to be, in opposition to the true welfare of the community. Again and again it appeared that there was not only a possibility of conflict between the state and the moral purpose inherent in social organization,[2] but there was also a sense of a gulf between

[1] George Eayrs, *Letters of John Wesley*, p. 255.
[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iv., p. 467; vol. ii., p. 245.

the governing and the governed. "I suppose the Bill intended to be brought into Parliament will never see the light," wrote Wesley in connection with a projected Act. "The great ones find other work for one another. They are all at daggers' drawing among themselves. Our business is, to go straight forward."[1] Such a feeling harmonized with the experience of the unenfranchised and unpropertied in a political order in which the possession of property did, in fact, enable those who governed to identify the policy of the State with their own interests. Wesleyanism chose to be a movement of the poor and in that choice lay a bias which no amount of expediency could obliterate. The significant point, however, is that there was no felt opposition between the aims of religion and the business of the economic life, or the improvement of the conditions of present existence, and yet, beyond a very restricted sphere, the appeal to politics was rejected and governmental action was deeply distrusted.

The restricted limits of governmental activity which Wesleyans assumed to be normal were indicated in what was expected of rulers. The end of government was the benefit of the governed, but that translated into practice was largely localized in a form of the police function. "We do not desire any preferment, favour, or recommendation, from those that are in authority, either in Church or State," wrote Wesley, "but we desire . . . that you would effectually suppress, and thoroughly discountenance, all riots and popular insurrections, which evidently strike at the foundation of all Government."[2] This appeal for relief against the widespread persecution which the early preachers suffered under attacks from irresponsible mobs

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 322.
[2] *Idem*, *Journal*, vol. iii., pp. 168-169.

and unfriendly local authorities reflects the limited sphere assigned to public officials. Their function was clarified by a more detailed definition of political rights.

The spokesmen of the movement were not so politically passive as to deny that there did exist certain civic rights, or to claim for them a validity superior to legal enactment, expediency or historical will. "Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature"[1]—a law elsewhere termed the spiritual law, the law of reason, and the law of God. This seemed in no sense equivalent to admitting that anarchic doctrine of consent advanced by the radicals. The alleged natural right of every individual to share in the process of government was merely irrelevant nonsense to men who made clear their fundamental conviction that the possession of civil liberty and the franchise were not synonymous in England. "I have no representative in Parliament; but I am taxed; yet I am no slave,"[2] said Wesley to illustrate a distinction which he felt to be real. This was so because a denial of the privilege of voting for a member of Parliament seemed to be "no infringement either of . . . civil or religious liberty."[3] The liberty which the Wesleyans defended was rather a condition of a more basic initiative than the franchise. The function of government was its guarantee. Civil powers were instituted to protect the conditions of that liberty, which are invariably concerned with freedom from the encroachments of others upon claims justly made and inherently defensible.

Liberty of conscience was, of course, held to be unassailable as a condition of any real social freedom. It is

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 79.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 81. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

" that liberty which every man may claim as his right, by the law of God and nature, and to which every Englishman, in particular, has a right by the laws of his country." [1] Even Roman Catholics must be tolerated, although denied any access to those positions of influence in the State which they could utilize to impair historic English liberties—a denial which did not appear to be in any sense an encroachment upon their civil liberties. The right to free expression of opinion as part of one's liberty of conscience further marks the status of the Wesleyan outlook in the stream of eighteenth-century liberalism. It was held to be part of the context of freedom that every man " says what he will, writes what he will," and " prints what he will." [2] This had proved to be an irritating question in contemporary events. In view of his patriotic defence of the Government and a disapproval of Wilkes which was almost violent, Wesley might have been expected to be suspicious of the liberal claim on this point. Yet, in fact, he publicly criticized the Government for " the measures which have been taken relative to the Middlesex election," and in the pivotal question of the rights of the press he ranged himself on the side of those who disapproved of the use of general warrants even when the instances debated seemed of little significance to him.[3] Few will deny that the cry for a free press had easily merged into an irresponsible licence. The country was engulfed by publications advocating ideas which Wesleyans could regard only as reprehensible and much that was indecent. But even this failed to produce a modification of their position. The torrent could be escaped, Wesley explained, only by " restraining the licentiousness of the press. And is not this remedy worse

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 268.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 137. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

than the disease?" Therefore the one defensible course, it seemed irrefutable, was to devise means in fact to hold men legally responsible for the truth of what they published.[1]

It was not strange that a group of reformers struggling against established prejudices should assert anew the claim to legitimacy through the historically sanctified argument for religious toleration and the free expression of opinion. But a second condition of freedom defended was, at first glance, less germane to any exclusively religious programme. It was an insistent claim to a civil liberty interpreted in terms of economic freedom. Civil liberty, said Wesley, is "liberty to enjoy our lives and fortunes in our own way; to use our property, whatever is legally our own, according to our own choice."[2] Given the essential condition of social order, then the right of self-direction "according to our own choice" becomes a basic assumption.

The identification of property in land with political power involved the sanctification of the vested privileges, in the minds of contemporaries, but religion as the uncritical support of those privileges belongs to a later age of Methodism. In its reasoned outlook during Wesley's leadership, the term "property" connoted all forms of material wealth, not the special category of landed property. It is in this wider sense that it was asked, as a test condition of freedom: "Are not you at liberty to enjoy the fruit of your labours? . . . I am at full liberty to use my property as I please."[3] This was certainly not a defence of vested interests. On the contrary, the defenders of the view which awarded special political rights to property-owners were asked sarcastically how they reached their

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 45.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 41. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

conclusion that an individual was any less a man because he possessed "not forty shillings a year; yea, or not a groat."[1] With his keen sense of justice it is admittedly surprising that Wesley did not adopt a more definite stand on the issue of enclosures. But in other connections there was manifested an open and frequent disposition to protest against those immoral attitudes which involved injustice to the unpropertied. Wesley perceived that much of the prevailing economic distress was due to a denial of social opportunity, and he excoriated the complacent critics who attributed it to the viciousness of the poor. On occasion he frankly questioned the system which made distress unavoidable or rendered men impotent to improve their own condition. Clearly, an emphasis upon economic security as the condition of civil liberty was not intended as an argument for the existing social iniquities. It was a common-sense recognition that no man could exercise free initiative without the material basis of life secured against irresponsible interference.

In this sense security of property was identified with the guarantee of personal freedom. The only alternatives envisaged were slavery or anarchy. "You and I," wrote Wesley to the revolting American colonists, "go where we will, and enjoy the fruit of our labours: This is liberty. The Negro does not: This is slavery,"[2] and therefore slavery is the "execrable sum of all villainies." It seemed equally true that the maintenance of this civil liberty was incompatible with an appeal to an irresponsible popular will which could display only the liberty of caprice. The literal application of the democratic principle to a large section of the community seemed merely to legalize

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 50.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

a licence which sought to equate liberty with a justification of envy. The liberty of that "many-headed beast," the people, would be a liberty to murder, to plunder, to use "their neighbours' wives or daughters" and "the liberty of murdering their Prince."[1] It was this apparent distrust of the undisciplined man that inspired a critic to retort: "Your pamphlet is neither more nor less than a studied insult upon all who have asserted the cause of public freedom,"[2] but the fact is clear that Wesley was arguing with equal vigour for personal freedom while condemning the method of the radicals. It was the principle of consent and independence as a method "which would be no blessing but an heavy curse," for no other reason than that it was judged inconsistent[3] with "liberty, real, legal liberty; a liberty from oppression of every kind, from illegal violence; a liberty to enjoy their lives, their purses and their property." A later apologist of political Methodism stated the position justly. "All have equally a right to that liberty by which man may do all that really conduced to his well-being," but the privilege of the franchise must not "be so extended as to endanger the rights in connection with personal freedom."[4]

It is evident, of course, that more than the phrases of Locke were borrowed by Wesleyan writers. Those fragments of Locke which had meaning for the century had left their impress upon everyone concerned with political problems. It is true that certain of the radical successors

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., pp. 42-43.

[2] Anonymous, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr John Wesley; in Answer to his Late Pamphlet, entitled, "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs,"* p. 4. London, 1771.

[3] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 136.

[4] George Cubitt, *Strictures on Mr O'Connell's Letters to the Wesleyan Methodists*, pp. 14-15.

of Locke, both French and English, received a summary and uncomprehending rejection at the hands of Wesley and his associates, though the ground of that condemnation was not so much a reasoned denial of their teachings as a revulsion from the religious and moral aspects of their writings.

Since the defined function of Government was to protect this civil liberty, it followed that the one pre-eminent political virtue was orderliness, as the self-evident condition of social organization. This did not, at least so far as the Wesleyan branch of the revival was concerned, denote merely the "order" which, in the minds of contemporary writers on poor relief, education and police, signified the existing system of social status and a divinely instituted inequality of classes. Indeed the irresponsible "beasts of the people" was a description which could apply to a "gentleman" as well as the degraded poor.[1] It was "orderliness" which was a virtue of personal conduct, not a description of a kind of social structure. It was simply the duty of Government to maintain orderliness, where necessary, in order to ensure that toleration of opinion which was the great prize of the Glorious Revolution, and that security which was the material condition of individual independence and free action. It is clear that this left an exceedingly narrow field for individual initiative in politics, but that inspired no sense of loss, since initiative and associative enterprise were not so much the marks of the political action as the characteristics of activity outside the fields of politics. It was this defence of initiative which made intelligible the virtue of orderliness. To co-operate in its maintenance, therefore, became the duty of every Wesleyan.

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. v., p. 341.

To the defence of such a political philosophy the movement's leaders gave continuous effort, supporting the Government with a zeal that was religious in quality. Methodists "do nothing in defiance of Government," the public was assured. They "reverence Magistrates, as the Ministers of God."[1] In fact, they "have no conception of piety without loyalty." In 1755 Wesley asserted that the societies' "warmest opposers are the Jacobites, who do not love us, because we love King George,"[2] while twenty-five years later Conference resolved that no one speaking evil of those in authority, or prophesying evil to the nation, should be permitted to remain a Methodist preacher.[3] This was no sporadic interest. It was the familiar concern of the societies. "Our brethren in various parts of England have set apart an hour a week for prayer . . . in behalf of our King and country,"[4] noted Wesley of a practice which is noteworthy because it was common. It is decisive testimony of the degree that Methodists addressed themselves to what was conceived to be the only political problem with which the people as a whole had an active interest.

If, as was asserted, liberty is a "right of every human creature," so that "no human law can deprive him of that right,"[5] and Government exists to protect that right, what happens in the event that Government oversteps its defined bounds and violates civil rights? The obvious answer of the radicals was the right of revolution. The logic of the divine-government theory was to abandon the

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 114.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 324.
[3] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 302.
[4] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 124; vol. viii., p. 15; *Journal*, vol. v., p. 351.
[5] *Idem*, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 79.

issue to Providence. The leaders of the revival were saddled with both the defence of rights built upon ethical grounds and a doctrine of providence. The result was a curious espousal of the conclusions of both theories. They were indeed frank enough to admit their dilemma, but sought a way out by reasoning that seemed substantial so long as it was not subjected to the stress of trial. They denied both the right of Government to infringe civil rights, and, at the same time, denied subjects a rightful recourse to violent methods of change. Having already rejected the device of the franchise, no possibility of an orderly revolution was suggested. In theory, however, they were clear, and the flexibility of their attitude, in the context of the eighteenth century, betrays an unsuspected incongruence with the conservative tradition. It was clear that a conflict between subjects and their governors might arise, because "the law of man binds only so far as it is consistent with the word of God."[1] Fletcher explained with disarming frankness why this was so, and what set the limits of governing power. "All governing power is delegated from the King of Kings, and therefore it is subordinate to him, and it is limited by the bounds which he has fixed—that is, by reason, scripture, and the apparent good of the people."[2] Thus was the blind guidance of Providence attenuated. The rule of practice was then easy to formulate. "Subjection must be in everything required by the civil power, that can be done with a good conscience."[3] This was to place the rule of civil obedience squarely upon a moral and utilitarian ground and, by inference, to establish the grounds of defensible

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 120.
[2] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, p. 65.
[3] Jeremiah Brettell, *Fear God: Honour the King*, pp. 7-8.

disobedience. Anything that destroys the salutary ends of government, exactly as in marriage or religion, demands rectification, yet it must not be a change of whim or caprice, but of principle, and the need for the change must be indisputable. "I say without a capital reason," said Fletcher, with emphasis, "because, as God allows divorce in case of undeniable adultery, so he permits our renouncing a church undeniably and capitally corrupt, and our withdrawing from a Government undeniably and capitally tyrannical." [1] This was dangerous ground and surprisingly strong language, but it was the reasoning of a man whose prestige stood second only to Wesley's, and who submitted his argument to his chief for correction before publication.[2] Providence, it has been said in effect, ordains that civil power must be used for a definite moral purpose. What is to compel the fulfilment of that purpose in the state? If it is used otherwise, said Fletcher, "I would lament the usurpation, and bear my testimony against it," until "overruling Providence removed" [3] it. This is certainly not far removed from a defence of revolution. All this is, in fact, equivalent to saying that the government which the Divine Governor prescribes is the one which secures the moral approval of its subjects. This bald statement was even defended. How is it that "we may know the power that divine providence calls us to obey"? Whoever possesses "the legislative and protective power in the country where I reside," Fletcher answered, "and retains that power by the consent of the majority of the people, is the higher power, which I consider as actually ordained of God for my protection. To that power I will chearfully (*sic*) submit, so far as it is used for good." [4] By

[1] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, etc., p. 61.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 2. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 38. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

consent he meant, of course, that approval which subjects register in merely permitting a government to continue. God reveals His will through the will of the people. The people are not the origin of power, but in this sense they are the channel through which God registers His will.

This seems to justify in full the right or even duty of violent resistance. The fact of the matter is, however, that this reasoning was a vain attempt to uphold a theory embodying inconsistent elements. On the one hand it sought to enforce the moral accountability of the State. On the other hand it undertook to defend a form of providential prescription in the existing order. The incongruence of the providential and the moral principles in the Christian tradition, bibliolatry, the tradition of passive obedience, historical circumstances which made it highly desirable for the movement to shun any doctrine weakening the respectability of the revival forces, eighteenth-century political alignments which had identified the cause of religious toleration with loyalty to the Hanoverian succession—all these considerations conspired to make impossible the full approval of a doctrine of revolution in the event of the violation of civil rights. Therefore, no more than a form of passive obedience was defended, although it logically led to a view that authorized any changes in the State which moral law clearly required. Hence, it was suggested that one has a right to "lament" and "bear testimony against" an offending government. The temper was more sharply illustrated in the case of a government which had already been deprived of its authority. "If divine providence, instead of removing the usurper, established his power . . . which I would know by the general and lasting consent of the people," explained Fletcher again, "I would . . . submit myself to it as religiously

as the Christians of the fourth century did to Constantine the Great."[1] The Christian tradition was unable to escape the conflict of ethics and Providence. Wesleyans hesitated to justify the use of force in the future. Their view was little more than opportunism. At least, however, it revealed a surprising readiness to recognize God's will in the State through whatever could be demonstrated as morally required. In immediate practice, of course, leaders were content to affirm that while the State can claim no moral justification for infringing civil rights, yet "it may abuse its power, and enact laws whereby" the subject suffers.[2] The tradition of "passive obedience and non-resistance" carried great weight in the Wesleyan bias.[3] There was an important precedent for this compromise. It was pointed out that "the primitive Christians, labouring under the most cruel persecutions, were completely passive."[4] Therefore, explained Adam Clarke (1762-1832), Christians may take advantage of such laws as exist in favour of their civil rights, but in case of extremity "the true Christian must bear persecution" and accept martyrdom.[5]

All this serves to illustrate the Wesleyan temper rather than to determine which tendency would in fact have become dominant in case of a severe test. The issue, however, was not felt to be of great practical importance by most of the movement's leaders, for the simple but conclusive reason that "of all civil constitutions under heaven, the British is demonstrably the best."[6] When the

[1] John Fletcher, *American Patriotism Farther Confronted*, p. 38.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 233.
[3] *Idem*, *Journal*, vol. viii., p. 325.
[4] By "A Careful Observer," *Strictures on Methodism*, pp. 112-113.
[5] Adam Clarke, *The Origin and End of Civil Government*, p. 27.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

radicals called Wesley's attention to the potential threat to English liberties since the "King and Parliament can take them all away," he replied impatiently, "but they do not; and, till it is done," Englishmen are free.[1] The political objectives of the radical agitators were felt to be unnecessary as well as theoretically unsound. They were also foreign to the feeling of filial gratitude which Methodists increasingly felt because of the protection they were accorded. The persecuting mobs and frequent opposition of local authorities set in relief the friendliness and toleration of the central authorities.[2] "On every occasion, indeed, when any subject relative to Christianity has been agitated," explained one of the preachers at the opening of the new century, "we have reason to thank God for the British Government. I have witnessed its protection of Christianity at home and abroad, its tolerant and liberal spirit, and its hostility to persecution of every kind. The Methodist will not be ungrateful for this." [3] On the other hand, so far as the defence of civil liberty was concerned, the British Government came to be, in the eyes of Wesley and his colleagues, nearly flawless. "Every man says what he will, writes what he will, prints what he will. Every man worships God, if he worships Him at all, as he is persuaded in his own mind. Every man enjoys his own property; nor can the King himself take a shilling of it, but according to law. Every man enjoys the freedom of his person. . . . Above all, every man's life is secured, as well from the King, as from his fellow-subjects. So that it is impossible to conceive a fuller liberty than we enjoy, both

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 92.
[2] George Jackson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Darlington Circuit*, p. 23.
[3] James Nichols, *A Report of the Principal Speeches*, etc., p. 51.

as to religion, life, body, and goods."[1] Under these circumstances it is not remarkable that the right of revolution did not occur to early Methodists as a subject of insistent significance.

4. *Initiative and Politics*

Practical considerations, ethical principle, theological dogma and expediency all contributed to this formulation of the Wesleyan political outlook. Was there a central point of view which made these arguments more than opportunism?

The restriction of the sphere of government to police and the insistence upon orderliness as the cardinal political virtue might consistently represent either of two alternative judgments in respect to the Methodist's relation to politics. It might mean that the members of the societies were to reduce their concern for temporal affairs to a minimum. In that case all of the reasons advanced were mere insincere rationalizations of expedient concessions, and the writers themselves were not guided by any definite political interests. Was such an exclusive emphasis upon the soul's eternal salvation really characteristic of the revival? The security of property as an indefeasible right was an essential element of the political reasoning of Wesleyans. Did this mean, as Burke declared, that the masses "must respect that property of which they cannot partake. They must labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to their endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice"?[2] Did the revival leaders approve the current

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 137.

[2] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 2nd edition, p. 351.

view that the political function of religion was to serve as one of the police agents of the State, the first line of defence against any threat to vested social interests? If religion could be proved to have no other importance, explained an evangelical clergyman in the Establishment, "it must be allowed to be extremely convenient for the purpose of keeping mankind in order."[1] Did the Wesleyan group offer no more constructive political programme than this in respect to present affairs? Certainly the conception of an ordaining Providence regulating society was one important determinant in the political orientation of the movement's leaders. Did it monopolize the outlook during the first fifty years? That is one alternative, but it completely fails to account for all that is unique in the mood of the Wesleyan movement during its creative period. The seed of that tendency was obviously present, however, and it was capable of expanding to dominating proportions. It is at least important in understanding the direction in which the political consciousness of the group developed after the death of Wesley.

The other alternative is that all of these diverse elements were woven into a reasoned argument which, it was thought, led up to the central object and purpose of the revival to produce "useful members of civil and religious society."[2] From this view, it appears that the revivalists were profoundly concerned to write into civil society the principles of a social theory. Their assumption of government confined to the limits of a police function and their attempt to propagate the virtue of orderliness as the sole guarantee of civil and religious rights would not therefore be a counsel

[1] David Simpson, *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings*, etc., p. 227.

[2] F. F. Bretherton, *Early Methodism In and Around Chester*, p. 228.

of inertia or the transfer of objectives to a heavenly and distant future. On the contrary, the counsel was to energetic action, and the benefits avowedly sought were largely in the present. This fact will be detailed in the following chapters.

The eighteenth-century radical writers, both in France and England, were generally classed as enemies of religion, and that fact naturally blinded the Wesleyans to a fair estimate of their political ideas.[1] Yet a comparison of the revival's social theory with that of the radicals also indicates the largest possible agreement in political values with a fundamental divergence of methods proposed. The contemporary radical affirmed the utilitarian end of political institutions, and, assuming a realistic attitude towards government, described a method of attaining social welfare by enlisting the co-operation of all members of the community in organized political processes. The Wesleyan rejection of that method was complete. "These subtle metaphysical pleas for universal independency appear beautiful in speculation, yet it never was, neither can be, reduced to practice,"[2] represented a reasoned conviction. The Wesleyans also affirmed the moral end of political organization, but assumed that primarily the maintenance of orderliness, as the guardian of civil and religious liberty, constituted the jurisdiction of politics. They insisted, further, that the method of maintaining that orderliness was purely conventional and that the appeal to popular co-operation could not, in fact, achieve that end. But they then went further. The initiative of the individual was, if possible, even more central to the temper of these religious leaders than that of the radicals, with the obvious distinction that it should be

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. iii., pp. 386-387; vol. vi., p. 271; vol. xiii., pp. 413-416.

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 97.

an initiative of moralized character. Orderliness was exalted, not as an end in itself, but as the indispensable condition upon which the Christian ethic could function. For it is the essence of that ethic that coercion is destructive and that free action is the law of the inward man. That attitude was at the core of the Wesleyan outlook, even when it was vaguely realized as an axiom of social philosophy. Individual initiative was imperative not in the assumed sphere of politics so much as in that realm of activity which it was the function of police to guard from interference — religious life, economic action and social movement. But there existed an obvious condition of that initiative. Membership in civil society is, it was pointed out, in reality a moral responsibility, and accordingly no person is really qualified to fulfil the demands of his social obligations if he has not experienced a transformation of his self-centred character. "Acquaint yourself with Him," enjoined Wesley, in *A Seasonable Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain*, because "till this is the case, it is morally impossible that you should be a true patriot, a real lover of your country."[1] It would be fatuous to discover in this plea a mere subservience to the existing status. It may be that the Methodists were blind in their historical perceptions when they specified the sufficiency of this one prescription. Nevertheless, it was their conviction, reinforced by what they saw about them, that all the existing evils of civil society arose from a denial of the moral responsibility of individuals, groups and governors, in the community. The national ills and distress, declared Wesley, are due to prevailing degenerate moral character: luxury and sloth in economic life, deceit and fraud in public life,

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 125.

immoral and disorderly agitation in politics. "The greatest enemies the King has," said humble John Nelson[1] (1707-1774), are immoral citizens. It is in this sense that there was said to be "the closest connection" between "religious and . . . political conduct; the self-same authority enjoining . . . to 'fear God,' and to 'honour the King.'"[2] The integrity of civil society could rest only upon a moral foundation. The radicals agitated for ends that the Wesleyans approved, but they were held to be viciously wrong in their diagnosis and prescription of method, on the ground that personal freedom really proceeds only from social-minded will. A verse in *The Arminian Magazine* makes graphic the intensity of the conviction that individual character is the focal point of civil liberty:

"The numerous crowd all point at me,
While Chatham, Wilkes and Liberty
Besiege the royal ear.

. . . . .

But, oh! how little do the crowd
(With all this patriot fire endow'd)
Suspect a war within.

. . . . .

Sin, dreadful Conqueror, ties the chain,
Man, foolish man! doth not complain,
But talks of liberty!
Though pride, self-will, and base desire,
Point out the slave, and then conspire
To tell him he is free!"[3]

[1] "John Nelson," in *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers* (Thomas Jackson, ed.), vol. i., p. 20.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 435.
[3] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. x., p. 160, 1787.

The essence of liberty, in short, is held to be an inward state. It is character which achieves freedom in the proportion that it is guided by moral purpose.

A summary of Wesleyan political theory must stress the two conflicting tendencies which could not be permanently reconciled. Yet the main thesis was reasonably straightforward. In an orderly community, where freedom of conscience and personal security are assured, the free play of the moralized will can solve all social problems. The individual as a moral personality, guided by an inward but permanent temper of social responsibility (love), is, of course, the dynamic of this political theory. The usual comment upon this approach to politics is, obviously, that voiced by Rousseau. "We are told," he said, "that a nation of Christians would form the most perfect society conceivable. In this supposition I see only one great difficulty—that a society of true Christians would be no longer a society of men." It was the amazing confidence of Wesleyanism that such a society was a workable ideal. However visionary and ultimately impracticable it may have been, yet it remains that the movement did thus address itself to the problems of civil society. It seriously proposed a social theory which, defining the purpose of the community in moral terms, actually displayed so extraordinary an estimate of human capacity that it defined all social solutions as problems set to moral initiative. "The Wesleyans believe," wrote a later apologist under fire, "that as spiritual liberty extends, civil liberty will likewise be extended. . . . They believe that the possession of this so invigorates, so ennobles the man, that, when it is extensively enjoyed in any country, despotism cannot exist: they believe, therefore, that the surest way to promote both civil and religious liberty is to promote an

enlightened, active, scriptural piety. To this their efforts are largely directed. . . . It is thus that, at length, the difficult problem will be solved for reducing the interference of government and law to the lowest quantity consistent with the security of the governed." [1]

The application the movement gave to this principle reveals how closely it was allied to the radical political philosophy. Radicalism, however, undertook to achieve, mainly by the agency of political organization, those ends which the religious forces sought to achieve through individual character left free to work out its salvation in an orderly society. The Wesleyan theory possessed the most natural affinity with a *laissez-faire* doctrine. That the principle of social salvation by an exclusive dependence upon moral character was becoming increasingly futile in a complex industrial society is not sufficient ground for ignoring the fundamental value in the emphasis which the Wesleyans made—a value underestimated in theories of social change by mechanical and external methods.

5. *The Changing Temper of Wesleyanism*

The seeds of radicalism and reaction lay together in Wesleyanism of the first fifty years, awaiting the nurture of events. An ethical principle was curiously yoked with an idea of providence. It did not seem impossible to harmonize the two tendencies by thinking of divine control in moral terms. In addition, the guidance of Wesley, the bias of secondary leadership and the spontaneous sympathies of the class to which the movement appealed, fostered in the early societies a temper

[1] George Cubitt, *Strictures on Mr O'Connell's Letters*, etc., pp. 14-15.

distinctly favourable to the emergence of liberal values. The religious movement was inherently popular in its sympathies. A turning-point came with the passing of Wesley, the rise to influence of a new class, and the revolution phobia in contemporary society. Moreover, the unfortunate identification of radical ideas with irreligion was certain to arouse the hatred of Wesleyan authorities, who were unable to penetrate beyond superficial appearances.[1] On the surface, there seemed to be no radical change in the phraseology of the societies' political ideas. Under the surface there was fermenting a profound alteration of attitude. Subsequent developments are but the details of that new mood. Three traits appeared, each of them fundamentally opposed to that temper of change which is the life-blood of liberalism.

First, a providence of moral purpose easily became an irresponsible power ordaining existing status regardless of its ethical justification. Wesley's conception of particular Providence was, of course, in the tradition of Calvinism, but it reflected an intense personal experience of God rather than an austere prescription. His successors seized upon the doctrine, first to support the injunction against political activity by Methodists and then to sanctify social inequalities. The abrupt enlargement of the activities of Providence was an initial step. It is erroneous to ascribe existing distress " to His Majesty's ministers, not considering that the hearts of Kings and Kings' servants are in the hands of God, who disposeth of them as seemeth best to His godly wisdom," [2] wrote a Wesleyan of the new

[1] Thomas Taylor, *An Answer to the First Part of the Age of Reason*, pp. 40-41.

[2] Owen Davies, *A Sermon Preached at the Octagon Chapel, Chester, 25th February 1795*, p. 7.

generation. Why attack the Government, it is asked, when it is God who "has sent scarcity of bread among us" for spiritual discipline.[1] In this mood it was not difficult to argue for the support of the vested privileges of economic and political institutions, or to revive the conservative spirit characteristic of the age preceding the birth of the revival. The gain of a hundred years in social conscience seems to have been forgotten. The official view was expressed by a political apologist in 1796. "The disparity or inequality of conditions among men, which the wisdom of God appointed, serves to induce such as are poor and mean willingly to resign the power to them who already enjoy the advantage of a full and prosperous condition. And 'tis no less an inducement to the wealthy and honourable to cherish and protect the poor, without whose labours the most plentiful condition would be far from being happy or easy. . . . And to render society regular, happy, prosperous, secure and permanent, every member must stand in his own rank, and discharge those duties which providence and the welfare of society require at his hands."[2] It is as impossible to conceive this attitude in Wesley as its pious phrases obscured from contemporaries a divergence from the earlier spirit. The panic mind induced in England by the French Revolution accounts in part for the sudden crystallization of the new view. Thereafter all sympathy between the political reformers and official Wesleyanism was severed. "All levelling schemes are as impious as they are absurd," declared one of the outstanding leaders a few years later, because

[1] John Pawson, *A Sermon upon Isaiah xxvi.*, etc., pp. 7-8; *Memoirs of Mr George Cussons*, p. 126; *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xxii., p. 176.

[2] Thomas Wood, *Essays on Civil Government*, etc., p. 43.

"God has decreed that diversity of ranks shall subsist to the end of the world." [1]

This reversion to an overruling Providence was doubtless part of the larger movement which undertook to exchange the earlier primacy of moral results for a doctrinal rigidity.[2] The severely practical aims of the revival had been accompanied by a boasted scorn of theological strictness. As the century turned a "catch-word legalism" was gaining a dominant hand. It is true that a clause in the trust deeds executed between 1763 and 1771 had defined a doctrinal standard,[3] but the very nature of that norm reinforced Wesley's unvarying emphasis upon empirical results and tolerance of non-essentials. It was a far cry to the new mood. "One peculiar glorying also of Methodism is, no preacher can call any pulpit his own," [4] was the new boast—a situation prized as an excellence belonging "exclusively to Methodism." "We are in a position, in reference to the orthodoxy of our ministers," it was explained, "which the Church of England does not possess, and we have a power which we can exercise in perpetuity." [5] The ruling trend was towards a spirit of minute regulation. Wesley had said, "I do not wish to see young people dress like their grandmothers," [6] and labelled the quality of his attitude by explaining, "surely you cannot be ignorant that the sinfulness of fine apparel lies chiefly in the expensiveness: in that it is robbing God and the poor." In marked

[1] John Stephens, *The Mutual Relations, Claims and Duties of the Rich and the Poor*, p. 32.

[2] W. H. Meredith, *The Real John Wesley*, p. 129.

[3] J. S. Simon, *Proceedings of the W.H.S.*, vol. ix., p. 44.

[4] William Hatton, *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of Local Preachers*, p. 23.

[5] Anonymous, *Reasons for Methodism*, etc., pp. 17-18.

[6] T. A. Seed, *Norfolk Street Wesleyan Chapel, Sheffield.*

contrast was the inflexible legalism, illustrated by the Conference action in 1806, undertaking to prescribe exactly what it was permissible for men, women and children to wear.[1] In the earlier period it had been strongly impressed upon the preachers to avoid propagating the revival's teaching by an appeal to fear.[2] The preachers of the new generation were accused of preaching sermons "seasoned with brimstone, and glowing with hell-fire," but the charge was embraced with enthusiasm. To do otherwise, it was said, was to "forget their mission."[3] In this doctrinal strictness there was manifest the new rôle of theology at the expense of an earlier frank concern for the affairs of the present life. Wesley offered reasoned grounds for the Methodists' withdrawal from political agitation, but his empirical conclusion was transformed into the typical dogma of eternal compensation for present injustice. To this end, the proud service of the preachers was "reminding" their congregations "that our Kingdom is not of this world."[4]

A third and convincing evidence of the altered mood at the turn of the century was the movement's official political record. The intensifying conservatism of the parent body drove out the actively liberal groups with a consistency that is eloquent testimony both to the policy of the leaders and the persistent strength of the inherent liberalism of the societies. In spite of the Wesleyan

[1] *E.g.* Latham Wainewright, *Observations on the Doctrine, Discipline and Manners of the Wesleyan Methodists and also of the Evangelical Party*, p. 164.

[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, 1896, p. 22; John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. i., p. 139; vol. iii., p. 196; John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., pp. 284, 297; Samuel Warren, *Memoirs and Select Letters*, etc., p. 15.

[3] *Miscellaneous Papers in Defence of Evangelical Religion and of the Methodists*, p. 35.

[4] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xx., p. 315 (1797).

attempt to canalize civic initiative into other channels, the political reform agitation of the last third of the century succeeded in infecting the societies. Many individual members subscribed to radical sympathies.[1] In the corporate life of the societies it took the form of a plea for the more democratic organization of Methodism. There existed legitimate grounds for discontent in the restrictions which were imposed upon local initiative—limitations set in the interests of efficient organization. The authority of John Wesley kept the smouldering revolt within bounds.[2] He did so without committing his leadership to an actively reactionary politics. When his paternal authority was withdrawn the repressed issues broke into flame.[3] The clamour for reform within the Connexion paralleled the agitation for popular reform outside. Many who were not in sympathy with the programme of radicalism promoted the connexional controversy. Frequently the preachers were aligned with the popular membership against the local society officials, many of whom were Anglican in sympathies and, as a prosperous class, "resisted the alterations for which the people struggled."[4] On the other hand, the strong feeling engendered by current political propaganda strengthened distrust between preachers fearing diminished authority and the people revolting against arbitrary leadership.[5] Leaders among

[1] *E.g.* G. J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, etc., pp. 49-50; T. P. Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting*, p. 21; Mrs Richard Smith, *Life of Rev. Henry Moore*, pp. 120-121; Henry B. Ridgaway, *The Life of the Rev. Alfred Cookman*, etc., p. 2.

[2] *The Jubilee of the Methodist New Connexion*, p. 61.

[3] R. M. Tucker, *The Separation of the Methodists from the Church of England*, p. 145.

[4] George Smith, *The Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, etc., p. 20; *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. viii., p. 123.

[5] F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, p. 159.

the agitators gravitated rapidly to copying current political ideas and phrases, and the succeeding controversy "continued for several years to convulse the societies."[1] Alexander Kilham (1762-1798), a preacher heading an organized revolt, was described with characteristic bias as one who "had not only unhappily imbibed the levelling doctrines which were common . . . but had even strangely applied them to religion. . . . He insisted that the people were in gross bondage. That they ought to rise up and deliver themselves. . . . That the preachers were merely their servants."[2] Kilham himself carefully defined the agitators' programme, which obviously did embody the key principles of contemporary radicalism. A greater measure of local autonomy, financial responsibility imposed by publicity of accounts, and popular concurrence in connexional matters were the three cardinal objectives.[3] The whole impulse was so closely allied with the larger political movement that its leaders frankly argued for a new form of government in the societies from the precedent established "by the rules and customs of the most enlightened civil societies."[4] "Many among its people, and some few of the preachers, demanded an entire remodelling of Methodism, so as to make it conform to their political-religious opinions."[5] The agitators even called themselves "the Friends of the People."[6] Within the societies this led to "angry discussions, and produced much

[1] Jonathan Crowther, *The Methodist Manual*, pp. 30-31.
[2] Joseph Nightingale, *A Portraiture of Methodism*, etc., pp. 486-487.
[3] Alex. Kilham (Editor), *The Methodist Monitor*, etc., pp. iii.-xi.
[4] Anonymous, *Free Enquiry, Mutual Deliberation*, etc., p. 13.
[5] George Smith, *The Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, etc., p. 23.
[6] Alexander Strachan, *The Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*, p. 213.

animosity and discord."[1] Even leaders and quarterly meetings were turned "into assemblies for popular debates."[2] The controversy led to the ejection of Kilham in 1796 and, with the denial of the right of laymen to representation in district meetings and Conference, a split from the Wesleyan group. The Methodist New Connexion was formed in 1797, numbering about five thousand members, and organized into seven circuits. Two hundred and thirty of the Wesleyan preachers repudiated Kilham's charges of abuses in the connexional government. The fact of the matter was that relatively few of the preachers had been thorough reformers, even when they shared in the agitation. Only a few were prepared to follow Kilham. The result of the agitation was to effect a limited reform within Wesleyanism. The revised rules of the Conference of 1797 provided for publicity in financial affairs, increased initiative by local authorities in temporal matters, and a reduction of the arbitrary authority of the preachers in the societies.[3] But it failed to approve the first thesis of the New Connexion, which was "that the people should have a voice in the temporal concerns of the societies, should vote in the election of church officers, and should give their suffrages in spiritual concerns."[4]

The significance of this first controversy after Wesley's death was that it forged into a definite creed the official anti-liberal position of the main body of Methodists. Thereafter the ostensible principle of the Connexion's political policy was to refuse "to unite with either of the

[1] Alexander Strachan, *The Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*, p. 214; J. U. Walker, *A History of Wesleyan Methodism in Halifax*, p. 210.
[2] James McDonald, *Strictures on Methodism*, pp. 78-79.
[3] Mrs Richard Smith, *The Life of Rev. Henry Moore*, pp. 171-178.
[4] George Smith, *The Policy of Wesleyan Methodism*, etc., p. 25, quoting Allen, *Religious World Displayed*.

political and religious parties of the day." [1] The fact was that in committing itself to neutrality it became violently partisan. Neutrality as maintained meant the active support of the existing order in all of its aspects. "None of us shall, either in writing or conversation, speak lightly or irreverently of the Government under which we live," ordered the Minutes of the Conference of 1792—a caution reiterated by subsequent conferences. This negative position rapidly became a detailed doctrine of conservatism. Methodists have only "detestation of all sedition and rebellion," [2] the Conference of 1800 declared in an address to the King. The reason that they will not thus become "dupes of faction," explained a prominent representative of the parent body, is that they know well "that their Master's kingdom is not of this world." Therefore "the preachers have circulated books and sermons on loyalty and social order." [3] The work of the leaders was well done. In the first quarter of the century the political temper of the old connection had been sufficiently fixed for an observer to note that the political docility of Methodists was "what nobody denies." [4]

Inextricable from the connexional dispute was the activity of individual Methodist radicals. The effect of the political agitation was to diminish chapel attendance, so that only later, when "the popular delusions . . . were dispelled," were the "ordinances of religion . . . better attended." [5]

[1] Joseph Benson, *A Vindication of the People*, etc., p. 27.
[2] Mrs Richard Smith, *The Life of Rev. Henry Moore*, pp. 188-189.
[3] Joseph Sutcliffe, *The Divine Mission of the People called Methodists to Revive and Spread Religion*, etc., pp. 44-45.
[4] "Observator," *A Letter to the Rev. John Stephens*, etc., p. 7.
[5] Alexander Strachan, *The Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*, pp. 179-180.

Many Wesleyans had supported radical groups, "to which the delectable works of Paine were admitted." [1] One enthusiast boasted, "Mention me a sentiment or paragraph in" the *Rights of Man* and I'll tell you the very page it is to be found in that book.[2] The answer of the Wesleyan body was to set its face more rigidly against the reform movement. In a period of "epidemical insubordination," it was said, "it is to be lamented that some Methodists have been infected: they, however, generally soon leave the Society." [3] This became the settled policy. Those who yielded to "the fatal dereliction," wrote a later president of the Connexion in 1810, "have been driven from a connection to which they were a disgrace." [4] Even so able and fair a leader as Thomas Coke (1747-1814), who had been disposed to more liberal measures at an early date,[5] felt free to declare in 1801: "I was happy to find that the three men had been expelled from the late Mr Wesley's society about five years ago solely for their democratic sentiments." [6] The history of Wesleyan Methodism during the succeeding generation is a record of the expulsion of liberal elements from the organization and a bitter opposition to the radical programme. This attitude became an active force in the presence of any manifestation of popular discontent or political agitation. "The Methodist preachers were among the first to declaim against" the Luddites.[7] In

[1] J. U. Walker, *A History of Wesleyan Methodism in Halifax*, p. 61.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.
[3] Valentine Ward, *A Miniature of Methodism*, etc., p. 154.
[4] John Stephens, "Christian Patriotism," *W.H.S. Proceedings* vol. iii., p. 5.
[5] Quoted in *Free Enquiry, Mutual Deliberation*, etc., p. 43.
[6] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xi., p. 218.
[7] J. U. Walker, *Methodism in Halifax*, p. 254.

the Yorkshire agitation of 1812, Conference addressed the societies, affirming its "utmost horror" of the agitation principles, and urged "loudly and earnestly": "Fear the Lord and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to change!"[1] The preachers "publicly and from house to house laboured to counteract the influence of wicked and mischievous men"—a fact which Methodist leaders broadcast with the boast that no other religious group could lay claim to so unique a record.[2] Jabez Bunting (1779-1853), whose own father had been a radical although a Methodist preacher, may well have voiced his quoted assertion that "Methodism hates democracy as much as it hates sin."[3] In any event he refused even to conduct a burial service for a man "shot while attempting to break into the mill of Mr Cartwright, near Cleckheaton." His refusal, as the outstanding Methodist of his day, inspired the permanent hostility of the workers.[4] Again, in 1817, Conference engaged in an active campaign to nullify the work of the popular agitators.[5] The crystallized bitterness against the Wesleyan leaders was so great that every week the proceedings of the leaders' meetings were made the subject of attacks in "revolutionary newspapers."[6] Contemporary with the Peterloo incident a few preachers assembled with the multitude on Newcastle Town Moor. Disciplinary action followed. Two of the preachers, refusing to renounce connection with the reformers, were threatened with expulsion, and with about

[1] William Vevers, *An Essay on the National Importance of Methodism*, pp. 103-104.
[2] Anonymous, *Reasons for Methodism*, etc., pp. 28-29.
[3] H. U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, p. 86.
[4] J. U. Walker, *Methodism in Halifax*, p. 255.
[5] William Vevers, *National Importance of Methodism*, pp. 107-108.
[6] T. E. Brigden, *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iii., p. 18.

twenty other persons they withdrew from the Connexion.[1] The anti-radical attitude of the Wesleyan leaders was as aggressive as were the liberal tendencies of many of its rejected children.

Nevertheless, the inherently democratic influences of the movement made it impossible ever to extirpate those sympathies, so that even when official pressure was brought to bear upon outstanding individuals, many private members retained their radical views and remained members of the societies. Lay Wesleyanism was more democratic than its conservative ministry and its richer members. The important rôle played by Methodists, including many from the parent connection, in all the popular movements of the nineteenth century which were not obviously political, was a happy demonstration of that fact. In 1820 it was claimed that " tens of thousands of reformers, and constitutional reformers too," were members of the Wesleyan Connexion.[2] On the other hand, it is perhaps this very fact of the naturally liberal temper of the movement that accounts for the notable reform and philanthropic leadership nurtured within the Wesleyan group, only to be cut off in maturity. William Lovett, Thomas Cooper, Samuel Bamford, Michael Thomas Sadler, Richard Oastler and J. R. Stephens—all were indebted to early Methodism.[3] Thomas Paine, apprenticed to a Methodist master, was reported both to have been a sincere attendant and, in the absence of the regular preacher, to have conducted a Methodist

[1] H. Kelly, *An Impartial History of Independent Methodism*, etc., pp. 9-10.

[2] By "A Well-Wisher to Methodism," *Animadversions on the Address of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, etc., p. 8.

[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xx., p. 221.

service.[1] Sadler, Stephens and Cooper had been preachers within the societies. All of them, either by inclination or by compulsion, exercised their social leadership outside Wesleyanism.

The official temper did not, however, operate solely against individuals. From the death of Wesley in 1790 to the prosecution of Stephens in 1834 there was a succession of suppressed attempts to introduce more democratic government into the Connexion, regularly producing splits from the parent body. Almost invariably the break came on political and administrative rather than doctrinal grounds, and generally paralleled a period of political agitation. The Methodist New Connexion in 1797, the Band Room Methodists in 1806, the Primitive Methodists in 1810, the Bible Christians in 1815, the Methodist Independents in 1806, the Methodist Unitarians in 1806, the Protestant Methodist secession in 1828, and the Stephens case in 1834 testify to the ferment in the Wesleyan community. An account of the agitation in 1834 sounds like a description of the events leading up to the first secession, the New Connexion, in 1797. "The rights of the people were again set forth, the finality and independence of local courts insisted on, and the demand of lay delegates to sit and vote in the Conference renewed. . . . The result was that another secession took place, and the Association Methodist community was formed on nearly the same principles of polity as had been developed in the New Connexion" in 1797.[2] It was an unending series of groups "thrust out"[3] by the thoroughness of the official policy of the parent body.

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. viii., p. 31, note.
[2] George Smith, *Polity of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 33.
[3] H. Kelly, *History of Independent Methodism*, pp. 10-12.

It was not strange that Wesleyan Methodism, shaped in its birth as the religious society of the poor, should have "lost the confidence of the intelligent working man" by the period of Chartism.[1]

[1] H. U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, p. 12.

CHAPTER V

THE WESLEYAN AVOWAL OF THE ECONOMIC IDEAL

THE attitude of early Wesleyans towards economic affairs was free from the distortion forced upon their politics. It was, therefore, a more reliable criterion of the normal temper of the revival. It involved no futile effort to reconcile contradictory elements grafted into the Christian ethic and promoted by the vagaries of historical expediency. Current social bias forced upon the new movement no technique of self-defence in the interest of respectability, as was the case in the sphere of politics. On the contrary, the subtle desire for public approval that fostered opposing tendencies of the Christian ethic in politics could work through the economic life without arousing vested prejudices. The accelerating need of the developing industrial community coincided with a native tendency within the programme which the new movement sponsored. It would be obtuse to say that the voice of the revival's leaders merely reflected the surrounding situation. Rather in the current circumstances there existed a friendliness to the normal development of the revival's temper. Both these factors—the social context and the genius of the revival—conspired to enlarge the prestige of the economic interests. Whatever distinction as an experiment in social ideas Wesleyanism may claim follows from the fact that in this sphere it sought to be consistent in applying a Christian ethic. The anomaly proves to be that in doing so it rendered its programme unworkable.

1. *The Pursuit of Economic Ends*

At no point did early Methodism display its mood more enthusiastically than in that part of its enterprise devoted to temporal interests. Its ideal was a quality of life vitalized by a religious motive, but present benefits remained in the foreground. Was not the unique theme of every sermon the immediate moral transformation of character, authenticated not by a remotely realized salvation, but by the discernible evidences of social conduct? Methodists were taught to address themselves to all their affairs in this severely empirical temper. "Above all," the new enthusiasts were warned, "do not make the care of future things a pretence for neglecting present duty."[1] The blatant claims of an eternal salvation may have come later to monopolize the teaching of the leaders. Under Wesley, Methodists were enjoined simply: "Live thou to-day. Be it thy earnest care to improve the present hour. This is your own; and it is your all. The past is as nothing, as though it had never been. The future is nothing to you: It is not yours; perhaps it never will be. . . . Therefore, live to-day."[2] Nothing is clearer than that Wesleyanism did not seek to impose upon its followers a rigorous discipline exclusively for the sake of a future benefit. The manner in which economic teachings were introduced into the body of its ethics is a measure of its genuine preoccupation with present satisfactions.

The reasoned ideas of Methodist leaders in respect to economic matters started from what was really the initial axiom of their social theory—the axiom that in

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 390.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 392.

society only moral failures are inherently evil. This meant there was no awareness of that dualism which condemns human institutions as tainted and therefore to be shunned by devoted disciples determined to make no compromise with the world. The contrast of this-worldliness and other-worldliness was out of place in this context, and its antagonisms did not dictate the mood of the early period of the revival. Spiritual aspirations aroused no sense of enmity to society's processes. Judgment was guided by the conviction that social maladjustments were due, not to any necessary defect in the organized community, but to human will. It was men who failed, not the arrangements of the social structure, which, in fact, were held to possess an element of providential prescription.

It followed logically that, confronted by the growing interest in economic affairs, there was no impulse to condemn the object of material gain as an unworthy one. "Let the world be as corrupt as it will," challenged Wesley, "is gold or silver to blame?" to which the obvious answer was, "The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that use it."[1] There was every practical reason, of course, why Methodists should have been encouraged to seek material independence, since the group to which the movement especially addressed itself was the unpropertied. But only its reasoned outlook can account for the wholeheartedness with which it approved economic enterprise and the pursuit of gain. This was no mere approval of wealth as a necessary compromise with evil. It reveals, rather, a lusty zest for present affairs which gave rise to the confident assertion that money "is unspeakably precious" for the wholly cogent reason that it is the "precious talent which contains all the rest."[2] That

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., p. 126.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

judgment, incongruous at first glance in a religious context, acquires consistency when viewed in the full context of the revival. No moral casuist of the Puritan tradition laid a broader foundation for the fervent embrace of economic aims and values or one better suited to the expansive tendencies in the society of the industrial revolution. The corollary of the asserted beneficence of money was to approve it as a goal of effort. There was no discoverable disposition to shirk the application. The literature of the movement is explicit. With unhesitant terseness Methodists were exhorted: "Gain all you can." This is one part of a formula which, in its entirety, covers the revival's representative teaching about material wealth. Much more was said about the nature of property in connection with the justification of its use. But this first injunction demonstrates how readily the money-making motive was embraced as the ground of legitimate initiative. In the field of politics, it had been argued, there was practically no scope for the individual citizen's activity. The initiative denied in government was embraced in economics. The energies of those whom the revival dominated were frankly diverted to gainful enterprise.

There was advanced, moreover, a second ground for the divine sanction of the economic life, concerned not so much with the beneficence of money as the incidental benefit that accrues in the process of making it. A firmly entrenched view of human nature, the Christian tradition, and the surrounding social situation all combined to elevate the prestige of the activities of the economic life. Each of these laid upon men the necessity of the industrial virtues. All of the most respectable opinion argued that human nature could not withstand the ravages of idleness. Work was a condition of happiness. A persistent industriousness

was, also, the mark of moral character. The traditional Christian ethic and the shibboleth of Puritan legalism were at one on this point. "Fervent in spirit, not slothful in business," had acquired the force of law. Besides, everything in contemporary life enhanced the prestige of the assumption. For generations the most irritating of social problems had been poverty, and therefore idleness had come to be universally esteemed the sore spot of the community. The moral dissoluteness of those whose means enabled them to live in idleness seemed to the revival leaders only another evidence of the unnaturalness of a life not ordered by an aggressive and serious purpose. It is hardly astonishing, moreover, considering the depressed living conditions of a large proportion of the class to which Methodism made its early appeal, as well as the fact that the dissolution of cultural bonds had left that class with little capacity for the profitable use of leisure, that the laborious life alone seemed desirable. It would be long before even radical philosophers would conceive the idea of the education of taste, although it was one of the surprises of Wesley's own breadth that late in his life he wrote and circulated an essay on taste which was penetrating to a degree that no merely pious generation could comfortably tolerate. Yet, the conception of leisure for cultural enjoyments would have been incongruous in the context of early Wesleyanism. There were only two alternatives felt to be possible in the existing situation—industriousness or morally corrosive sloth. Therefore, it was pointed out, "Every man that has any pretence to be a Christian will not fail to" school himself rigorously to "the *business*" of his calling, "seeing it is impossible that an idle man can be a good man,—sloth being inconsistent with religion."[1] It seemed

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 31.

in the world of the eighteenth century that both hallowed doctrine and experience determined the justice of the dogma that "without industry we are neither fit for this world, nor for the world to come."[1]

This exaltation of the virtue of industriousness derived its force from the larger ideal of an austere personal life. "We do not find any other body of people," boasted Wesley in a pamphlet addressed to the "people called Methodists," who "abstain from fashionable diversions, from reading plays, romances, or books of humour, from singing innocent songs, or talking in a merry, gay, diverting manner; your plainness of dress; your manner of dealing in trade; your exactness in observing the Lord's day; your scrupulosity as to things that have not paid custom; your total abstinence from spirituous liquors (unless in cases of necessity)."[2] To be "patterns of diligence, frugality, and cleanliness," summed up the one possible standard of conduct in temporal affairs. To give effect to such an ideal was in obvious harmony with the nature of the economic processes. The form of the argument was, of course, shaped by the ethical ideas of the revival, and the position drew particular force from prevailing social conditions which seemed to prove that self-indulgence was the root of existing social distress. Yet it did not go unrecognized that a common purpose was shared by the revival's ethical aims and the community's material prosperity. When the Methodists at Bristol protested to the Mayor and Corporation against a proposed playhouse, it was not the evil of literary pleasures upon which their opposition was founded, but a practical consideration, for, it was pointed out, it would be "peculiarly hurtful to a trading city; giving a

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 123.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 354.

wrong turn to youth especially, gay, trifling, and directly opposite to the spirit of industry and close application to business; and as drinking and debauchery of every kind are constant attendants on these entertainments, with indolence, effeminacy and idleness, which affect trade in a high degree." [1] That argument lay too central to the life of the revival to justify a charge of mere opportunism in this position. There was a real identity between civic and religious aims. The Wesleyan movement almost invariably addressed itself to practical problems. Utilitarian considerations, not theological argument, made the strongest appeal to its temper. The moral austerity and industrial ethic of the revival becomes more meaningful in this context, for it exalted virtues of the utmost practical use.

The linking of the religious experience of the revival with economic interests was no incidental relation. If this was the Puritan ethic of work, revivified by the new emotional forces, it was certainly not yet divorced from religious motives. The two were inseparable to the extent that one premised the other. A contemporary critic in the period before the reputation of the Methodists was firmly established, voiced the fear that the new enthusiasm could serve only to induce the poor to indulge further in their notorious laziness. It drew from Wesley the retort that " so far am I from either causing or encouraging idleness, that an idle person, known to be such, is not suffered to remain in any of our societies; we drive him out, as we would a thief or a murderer. 'To show all possible diligence' . . . is one of our standing rules; and one, concerning the observance of which we continually make the strictest inquiry." [2] This exaltation of work is a keynote

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., pp. 128-129.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 129.

of a comprehensive attitude. Idleness was actually ranked with the most heinous crimes. The fundamental economic virtue which was associated with the injunction, "Gain all you can," was thus infused with the drive of a religious crusade. The beneficence of both money and the process of getting it stamped the economic pursuits with divine sanction. The business of life was a serious affair, for no section of it lay outside the divine purpose. One was not making a compromise or yielding to an unwelcome necessity in undertaking to make money. A man's "business and refreshments, as well as his prayers," all served the one great end.[1] It was in this single-eyed mood that the Methodist was led to address himself to his daily work. Temporal business need not "interrupt . . . communion with God," it was explained, because it merely "varies the manner of it." Pious members of the societies were enjoined to ask themselves every morning: "Am I resolved . . . this day . . . to be diligent in the business of my calling."[2] There was no half-hearted commitment to the economic ideal.

It was inevitable that the views and discipline of Methodists should promote an exclusiveness which tended to isolate them from the rest of the community. Yet it is significant testimony to the prestige of the economic aims that business activities justified a modification of the demands of that aloofness. Commonly the leaders taught that the contagion of "sin and indifference" sapped the "spirit and zeal" of society members, and therefore any intimacy with the world was a "spiritual adultery." It was excepted that this separateness must not be permitted to interfere with the economic life of Methodists. They

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 345.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 209.

should not hesitate to mix with the "world" when business required it, because there existed no prohibition against "conversing with any man, good or bad, in the way" of worldly business. Indeed, it was explained, that may even require "us to have frequent intercourse with drunkards or fornicators: yea, sometimes it may be requisite for us to spend a considerable time in their company: Otherwise we should not be able to fulfil the duties of our several callings." Methodists must only be cautioned not to converse with the "ungodly" "more frequently than business requires," or to spend "more time in their company than is necessary to finish our business."[1]

The undertaking to infuse the economic activities with the emotional tone of religious devotion was simply another way of saying that "the societies, in all their parts, walk by one rule, knowing religion in holy tempers."[2] It predicated a strict standard of business conduct. The moral casuistry which translated authority into detailed rules still carried force. Methodist leaders were not less persistent, even if less systematic, than their Puritan ancestors. The Wesleyan section of the revival produced no treatise on the subject as complete as did the Evangelical wing in Henry Venn's *Whole Duty of Man*. But what may have been more forceful, Wesley and his colleagues made it the substance of their continuous attention in sermons, writings and active discipline within the societies. To "gain all one can" was the godly duty of the saved, but there were plain rules which regulated the Christian in that pursuit. Contemporaries were invited to judge the claims of Methodism by the type of character and standard of conduct which its members displayed in their business pursuits.

At the outset the condition of admission into the societies

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., pp. 466-467. [2] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 59.

was defined as a "desire to be saved from their sins," but it was immediately explained that "wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits," one of the chiefest of which was the nature of one's business conduct.[1] Deceit or sharp practice in commercial transactions was not to be tolerated. Familiar abuses gave occasion for the publication of specific rules. The prohibition against "buying and selling of uncustomed goods" was so persistently enforced, when it was a common practice, that it became a mark of Methodist peculiarity. "A few would not promise to refrain," it was noted on one occasion, "so these I was forced to cut off."[2] Evils of the pawnshop produced a rule against "giving or taking things in usury, that is unlawful interest." An insistence upon uncompromising business integrity was responsible for writing into the membership rules prohibitions against "borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them."[3] Tradesmen, who constituted one of the important classes from which the revival drew its support and leadership, were enjoined to adhere slavishly to the principle of fair prices and just competition. "We cannot, consistent with brotherly love," it was pointed out, "sell our goods below the market price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour's trade, in order to advance our own."[4] It may be objected that these injunctions merely carry the flavour of an outmoded economy, and it must be admitted that for a long time the movement's leaders realized less of what was implied in the new age than energetic members bent on

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., pp. 270, 273-274.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 413.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 270.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 128.

the quest of gain. A moral principle has no more vitality than its detailed application. To the leaders it was enough that social responsibility dictated a rigid standard of business conduct. The principle of fair prices was much less practical than the custom of charging whatever the market would bear, but oblivious of the new precept Methodist tradesmen were asked: "Do you not make a gain of anyone's ignorance, or necessity, neither in buying nor selling? Suppose you were engaged in trade: Do you demand, do you receive, no more than the real value of what you sell? Do you demand, do you receive, no more of the ignorant than of the knowing? . . . Do you demand no more than the usual price of goods of any who is in pressing want?" [1] Owe nothing, keep expenses within income and deal fairly—these were in the nature of statutes and seemed comprehensive enough to cover the entire ground. Their violation called for drastic discipline. Summary excommunication was the penalty for irregular business practices.[2] "I gave a fair hearing to two of our brethren who had proved bankrupts," records Wesley on a typical occasion. "Such we immediately exclude from our society, unless it plainly appears not to be their own fault."

The view which regarded all economic questions as moral problems was also thought to be an adequate guide to the conduct of both masters and workers. It was a principle which, applied with persistence and insight, might have made the movement the leaven of a social revolution. In fact, it was one of the less satisfactory deductions for the precise reason that, important as was the avowal of the ideal, its application made but meagre contact with the age. The habitual assumption of the

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., pp. 322-323.
[2] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 580.

revival was that the labour relationship was an ethical one in which one group had a definite function to perform as workers, and a second group had another function to perform as masters. Neither function was a determinant of one's status as a man. Each group was simply enjoined to perform conscientiously its plain obligations towards the other and the community. In this mood certain duties of workmen were considered mandatory. If they are Methodists, it was affirmed, they must be continuously industrious, respectful and reliable. They must perform their work in the attitude of a divine calling. Therefore the quality of their service and the amount they undertake to get done must not be determined by "the custom of the trade," or by present inclination, or by the example of other workers, but by what is right.[1] "What servants, journeymen, labourers, carpenters, bricklayers do as they would be done by? Which of them does as much work as he can?" the Conference Minutes of 1766 demanded, adding: "Set him down for a knave that does not . . . and the Methodist knave is the worst of all knaves."[2] It was this feeling that, whether masters or workmen, they were working "unto the Lord" that would keep both employers and employees from presumption. It would guard employers against that discontent and unruliness on the part of their workers of which there existed so much complaint. It was in this respect that Methodists would be better able to perform their present tasks, not in ambitionless content, but as a serious obligation to God. Critics had attacked the new movement as unfitting the poorer classes for the work of their stations, since, it was assumed, their energies and their interests would be diverted away

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. iv., p. 232 (1771 edition).
[2] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 580.

from their tasks. Wesley indignantly denied the charge in so far as it meant a dissipation of energies and interests, and pointed out that Methodists, in distinction to all other groups, were constantly disciplined to faithfulness in their daily work. Yet he himself also admitted the justice of the indictment in the sense that industrious character led to that improvement in the workers' position which aroused the conservative mind to bitter complaint.

There could have been few barriers between the two groups, however, when workers were instructed to rebuke their masters for the sake of the latter's spiritual welfare. Every assumption of the societies' outlook was a negation of the mood of exploitation. To workers it was explained that since the authority of the master was due simply to a function entrusted to him, and not to any inherent superiority over other men, there could "be no excuse for despising them, though they should be poor, mean, weak, or aged. The poorest and the weakest have the same place and authority which the richest and strongest have."[1] Masters, on the other hand, were called upon to treat their workers in the mood of a strictly paternal accountability. "Your servants, of whatever kind," they were told, "you are to look upon as a kind of secondary children: These, likewise, God has committed to your charge, as one that must give account. For every one under your roof that has a soul to be saved is under your care; not only indented servants, who are legally engaged to remain with you for a term of years; not only hired servants, whether they voluntarily contract for a longer or shorter time; but also those who serve you by the week or day: For these too are, in a measure, delivered into your hands."[2]

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. iv., p. 228 (1771 edition).
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 79 (1771 edition).

Employers who felt themselves in some sense the custodians of their workers' religious welfare could hardly forget that they were men.

This characteristic temper bore directly on the question of wages. Competition between employers for labourers' services might well violate the principle of a fair wage, it was thought by men to whom the regulating adjustment of supply and demand represented neither a practical nor a moral process. Hence Wesley advised a member of one of the societies on occasion, "To servants I would give full as much as others give for the same service; and not more."[1] It was held to be plainly immoral for workers to seek to compel more than a just wage to be paid them merely because they possessed the power to force an increase. But this was only one side of the question, and if it bore the stamp of an antiquarian's interest out of touch with present realities, other incidents revealed a genuine sympathy with workers' claims which justifies the prediction that Wesley would have ranged himself and the movement on the side of the worker had it been possible to understand the labour problem in the acute and impersonal forms it was rapidly assuming. For the right of the labourer to claim enough to live, not on a mere subsistence-level, but sufficient for an active if frugal life, carried its own authority. Masters were morally bound, it was stated, not to pay higher wages than were just, but that rule assumed the prevailing rate to be a fair one. The straightforward question of justice, answered in a common-sense manner, was the real determinant in each case. In at least one instance Wesley registered this basically liberal temper in connection with a concerted agitation for a higher wage which was judged to be

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 301.

inequitable. Bitterly opposed to mob action of any kind, yet he added a terse moral approval to the act of a "huge multitude of" tinners in Truro, who, "being nearly starved, were come to beg or demand an increase of their wages, without which they could not live." [1] No one excoriated the "bawling mob" and the "beasts of the people" more fiercely than did Wesley, so that any approval of direct action must have issued from a strong sense of social justice. Yet a plain abuse of the principle of fair prices was sufficient to win his approval of mass action. In 1758 he wrote with strange commendation of "the mob" which "had been in motion all the day; but their business was only with the forestallers of the market, who had bought up all the corn far and near to starve the poor, and load a Dutch ship, which lay at the quay; but the mob brought it all out into the market, and sold it for the owners at the common price. And this they did with all the calmness and composure imaginable, and without striking or hurting anyone." [2]

No different prescription was offered as a cure for the problem of children in industry. Indeed, the seriousness of the abuses which the new age was creating was not perceived by the spokesmen of the societies with enough clarity to focus their attention into any forceful protest. The early employment of children in industry was not in itself repugnant to the revival. It was merely a form of the labour relationship which called for a higher degree of paternal responsibility. In particular, the high place in the virtues accorded to industriousness was not conducive to a protest against early labour. The rigour of the

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 528.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. iv., p. 268.

Methodist school at Kingswood indicates clearly how little scope it was felt could rightly be allotted to ease and play, even for children — a view akin to that of Bentham and James Mill. Hence Wesley's commendation of a conscientiously managed silk-mill, which kept "two hundred and fifty children in perpetual employment,"[1] was to be expected. The evils which were quick to arouse concern, however, were those flowing from the immorality of child workers. Apparently, even with children, the conditions which promoted their degradation seemed of less importance than the personal character which it was supposed would create its own conditions of life. It was recorded with pride, therefore, that the effect of the revival upon a large number of working children in the mills at one place had been to vastly improve not only their morals but their temporal condition.

There was little in this that was directly pertinent to the solution of newly created industrial problems. The approach was one better suited to an earlier age than the increasingly impersonal relationships of the factory period. Wesley and his associates thought in terms of personal responsibility, fair prices and just wages in a day when those conceptions were rapidly losing all of their meaning. But the treatment did reveal a basic attitude and an important principle, which might have been put to a supreme test by an application to the conditions which were coming to be more acute during the last years of Wesley's leadership. However, one practical conclusion in harmony with the new age had been made abundantly clear. The pursuit of economic ends, even though conditioned by the strictest moral standard, was a divinely sanctioned calling.

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 300. 1787.

2. *The Use of Money*

This attitude towards the productive processes illustrates the attempt to join a healthy and enthusiastic acceptance of the present world with a strict ethical ideal. But it represented no more than a fraction of the outlook of Methodist leaders. In order to complete the view, it is necessary to turn to their second group of ideas relating, not to gaining, but to the disposition of material wealth. Those ideas were a consistent extension of first principles. The uncritical approval of the money-making motive was checked by defining in strictly moral terms the nature of money and the necessary relation of its use to character. The ambitious programme of the revival was to accept the existent economic processes and remould them to satisfy moral tests of validity. It was a rash programme, impossible of mass realization.

Of the two, the second part relating to the disposition of wealth was stressed more insistently than the part relating to its gain. Naturally the question of an equitable division of the product of industry, in its later forms, was not formulated. The nearest equivalent suggested to that conception was an insistence that all money be spent in ways dictated by social usefulness. The first test of that usefulness was its experienced consequence for the accepted ideal of personal character. It was the effect of the possessions upon the possessor. The ideal of a frugal and strictly self-disciplined moral life was not defined as the virtue of any one class, but an indispensable test of all men whatever their social status. Therefore, although riches are not in themselves held to be evil, and "it is no more sinful to be rich than to be poor," yet, "it is dangerous beyond expression,"[1] because of

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., pp. 244-255.

its effect upon the life of the possessor. The reason was obvious. Riches cannot give happiness [1] when happiness is defined in spiritual terms. Outward things are only a means to minister to an inward quality of life. Wealth almost inevitably comes to transform itself into an end, and then corrodes the moral life that is the first condition of happiness and the one goal of the revival's enterprise.[2] "It is absolutely impossible, unless by that power to which all things are possible, that a rich man should be a Christian," because riches seduce men to concentrate upon material satisfactions. The ideal of moral character is in its very nature a life of strenuous endeavour, serious purpose, austerity in manners and frugality instead of self-indulgence. Riches diverts men to "the love of the world; desire of pleasure, of ease, of getting money." It makes Methodists unwilling to do hard things, to toil and to sacrifice.[3] It nurtures self-indulgence and pride.[4] It deprives its possessors of the capacity for happiness.[5] As soon as men grow rich they begin to abandon their earlier simplicity, even in dress.[6]

Moreover, there were felt to be two other important reasons which condemn the possession of riches. First, it raises a consciousness of inequality among men. How hard is it for the rich, exclaimed Wesley, "not to think themselves better than the poor, base, uneducated herd of men!" [7] Such an attitude is even more reprehensible than it would be towards equals.[8] "How hard not to be a little overbearing, especially to inferiors!" [9] Secondly, by spending money for luxuries, and not being "content

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 372.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 369.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 7.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 218.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 382.
[6] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 477.
[7] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 368.
[8] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 220.
[9] *Idem*, *Journal*, vol. v., p. 324.

with what plain nature requires,"[1] the rich divert to their own luxury what would serve to supply the necessities of the community. To that extent they are responsible for the public distress which recurrently afflicts the nation.[2] The formula which accurately mirrors the official opinion during this entire period, in the presence of general economic distress, was strenuous labour for all and the avoidance of luxuries. It may have been an impractical prescription, but it is a measure of the practical interest of the Wesleyan mind in problems of wealth and its distribution.

The utilitarian test of the justifiable use of money was part, however, of the larger and even more central conception of a doctrine of ownership which constituted an integral part of the Christian ethic. In it there comes to the fore again that healthy-minded approval of the present life as inherently good because it bears upon itself the stamp of divine activity. It may not have been clear, even to leading writers, just how far to carry the theory in speculation. Yet it was the essence of their reasoning that God was working out a moral purpose in social institutions which only faulty human will at points thwarted. The practical bearing of that conviction for economics was a denial that property is an institution of human origin. Its corollary denied to men any exclusive or irresponsible control of their possessions. On the contrary, "our souls, our bodies, our goods and whatever other talents we have received" belong to God, and ownership rightly defined is but a convenient fiction representing the nature of a relationship between man and the moral purpose of God.[3] "As to yourself," wrote Wesley to a man of property, "you are not the proprietor

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., p. 131.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., pp. 53-58.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., pp. 137-139.

of anything; no, not of one shilling in the world. You are only a steward of what another entrusts you with, to be laid out, not according to your will, but his. . . . Is not God the sole proprietor of all things."[1] The noteworthiness of the doctrine does not lie in its originality but in the thoroughness and sincerity with which it was set forth as a fresh and imperative requirement. The explanation of the zestful approval of material wealth in Wesleyan theory lies in the relation of that wealth to the Divine will and moral purpose. "Above all," it was said, although God "has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest—money"—it is indefinitely to be desired only "if we are wise and faithful stewards of it."[2] The essence of ownership is therefore defined to be not control for personally chosen ends, but control for the fulfilment of a definite moral purpose. It was in this sense that a man's occupation, including the gaining of money, was a divine calling, for "no employment of our time, no action or conversation . . . is purely indifferent. All is good or bad, because all our time, as everything we have, is not our own."[3] The function of government had been held to be chiefly the protection of property, but in this Wesleyan view the conception of property itself was modified by its inherent social purpose. Those who use property in any form, whether in money or energy, for any other purposes than those dictated by the Christian ethic, "are not only robbing God, continually embezzling and wasting their Lord's goods, and, by that very means corrupting their own souls, but also" violating the rights of the community. "It is but like keeping money from the poor, to buy poison for ourselves."[4] It is hardly strange that a theory so blatantly

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. ii., p. 319.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 139.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 375.

stated should encourage critics to interpret it in a way consistent with communism. A pamphlet of 1760 sought to dissuade "all serious and well-disposed Methodists" from "their Notion of the Community of Christian Men's Goods."[1] But the conviction that Methodism did stand for such a notion persisted with sufficient force to impel Thomas Coke (1747-1814), in attempting to codify Wesleyan doctrine after the death of John Wesley, to try to dispel the criticism with official authority. "The riches and goods of Christians," he explained, employing the convincingly respectable language of the Article, "are not common as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast."[2] Both the criticism and its denial were justified. The extremely radical nature of the theory was, in fact, disguised by affirming the moral use of money to be an obligation of stewardship wholly dependent for its execution upon individual initiative. It is impossible to lay down any rules as to "saving all we can," and "giving all we can," wrote Wesley to a society member in 1776. "In this, it seems, we must needs" rely upon the individual acting under Divine guidance.[3] Had any other method of distribution been required, it would either have altered the entire direction of the movement or stifled it at birth. Nevertheless, the intense sincerity with which the doctrine was defended is as definite an index of the real mood of Wesley and his early leaders as the treatment of this part of the theory by later Wesleyans is an index of a reaction in the development of the revival.

Thus a doctrine of ownership and the alleged incompatibility of riches with moral character defined with fair

[1] Alexander Jephson, *A Friendly and Compassionate Address to all serious and well-disposed Methodists*, p. 33.

[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, 1896, p. 31.

[3] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 301.

completeness how money must be utilized if its use was to be justified. It was always a definitely moral question. It seemed clear that its very needs made the Christian character its own adequate guide. The "purpose of God" ought to be readily translated into practice. "Instead of saying, 'I want to know what is the will of God,'" a man who has been orientated by the Christian religious experience can be depended upon to ask merely, "What will make me most useful?"[1] In this form, however, the position might have appeared a pious but rather vague principle. It was not left without more definite and detailed content. In the use of money, several just and necessary kinds of expenditures were set down as obviously allowable. The first claim upon all money gained is the economic independence of the possessor.[2] One must "owe no man anything." It was equally reasonable that men who were engaged in a divine calling should provide for the necessities of their vocation. Therefore "men in business are to lay up as much as is necessary for the carrying on of that business."[3] Finally, one must provide for the necessities of oneself and one's dependents.[4] Yet it is very important that those necessities should be carefully appraised in the light of what are "reasonable wants." There is no justification for unlimited expenditures under the guise of necessities. They must be "plain necessities of life, not delicacies; not superfluities,"[5] and not the acquired wants of a greatly elevated standard of living.

As a legitimate provision for dependents, especially children,[6] it is also imperative to furnish not only the immediate necessities of life for one's family, but also "with

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 475.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 147.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 3.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 368; vi., p. 147; vii., p. 3.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 367.
[6] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 3.

the means of procuring them when we are gone to God." [1] Of course the same rules about possessions hold for one's dependents as for oneself. Therefore only such bequests are justified as will enable one's survivors to live as they are accustomed and "what would keep [them] above want." [2] Beyond that, it is the worst possible use to accumulate money for posterity.[3] Inherited wealth is a prime evil, for it will be certain to injure those who receive it. "Will you then rejoice in the money you have left behind you?" asked Wesley. "Or in that you have given to support a family, as it is called—that is, in truth, to support the pride, and vanity and luxury, which you have yourself despised all your life long?" [4] If money is to be bequeathed, it was suggested, it should be given to one who knows how to use it with moral discrimination.[5] In the same mood, parents were urged not to "seek riches for your children by their marriage," for to call such a union a "good match" is, "by parity of reason," to "call hell a good lodging." [6]

Having supplied the basis for a self-respecting and independent life, there can be no further justification for accumulating wealth. It was not a matter of choice, for "to lay up any more, when this is done, is what our Lord has flatly forbidden." [7] Therefore, "I charge you," said Wesley, "do not increase your substance." It is imperative to gain all one can. It is equally necessary that one live without ease and luxury. It is mandatory that all the remainder be devoted to satisfy the needs of the community. "All who observe the first two rules," to gain and to save, without the third, to give all they have, "will

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 367.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 133.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 374; vi., p. 146.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 320.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 133.
[6] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 85.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 3; vol. v., p. 368.

be twofold more the children of hell than ever they were before." [1] Everything that is more than enough to supply reasonable wants, the Divine Proprietor commands, must be given to the poor "whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of my substance which I had placed in thy hands for this purpose." [2] No alternative is offered. "We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can: that is, in effect, to grow rich," said Wesley. But this is to destroy the religious experience itself and to defeat God's purpose. "Is there no way to prevent this? . . . There is one way, and there is no other under heaven," and that is to "give all they can." [3] "'Lay not up for' thyself 'treasures on earth.' This is a flat, positive command; full as clear as, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.'" [4] Here was a rock of offence.

3. *Material Success, the Christian Ethic and Providence*

If any further evidence were needed to demonstrate the harmony discovered between the aims of the revival and the enthusiastic pursuit of economic ends, it is provided in the direct effect the revival was alleged to have on material success. The movement's leaders were convinced that it was not a chance relationship. Both elements of Wesleyan teaching were held to justify a presumption of prosperity. First, it was pointed out that in its very nature the kind of character produced was peculiarly fitted to succeed in the pursuit of gain. The qualities which were inseparable from the Christian moral character were the identical qualities

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 286.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 146.
[3] *Idem*, *Arminian Magazine*, vol. x., pp. 155-156, 1787.
[4] *Idem*, *Works*, vol. v., p. 373.

which were also indispensable in making wealth. Work incessantly and avoid all that diverts from the immediate task. Live frugally and therefore spend as little as possible. "How directly conducive are these virtues to that very end,—the flourishing of our manufacturers!" exclaimed Wesley.[1] Thus far it was an exaltation of the temperament of the ideal worker. This striking congruence of types—the ideal business man and the Christian moral character—was felt to give the Wesleyan a marked temporal advantage. A man who had achieved the revival experience of perfection would certainly not "be incapable of . . . worldly business." As a matter of fact "he would be more capable than ever, as being able to do all things without hurry or carefulness, without any distraction of spirit."[2] To enjoin upon his followers the Christian virtues, said Wesley, was equivalent to telling them to grow rich. It is, of course, a caricature to take this single tendency as one opponent did, and accuse Methodists of an uncritical acceptance of the money-making ideal. The remainder of the teaching regarding the use of money and the nature of ownership was equally binding. Nevertheless, it is irrefutably part of the revival's service to have exalted the economic virtues and to have endowed its followers with a special capacity for successful economic enterprise.

The other element of the Wesleyan outlook carried similar implications. The intrusion of an uncritical conception of providential interference in political affairs has been noted. The same view was present, germinally, in its early economic outlook. But just as its full implication was not realized in Wesley's lifetime in politics, so it was not applied on all-fours in economics. Its chief note-

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. ix., p. 178.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 400.

worthiness lies in its subsequent discovery as a fresh bulwark to conservatism. Nevertheless, it played a part in the outlook of even the early Methodists. The doctrine of stewardship was more than a theory of moral accountability. It was the doctrine of an immediate providential preoccupation in material as well as spiritual processes. No other view could be reconciled with the affirmation of the divine source of business calling, by the acceptance of which one became an agent of the divine purpose and will. It was inevitable therefore that economic success should be regarded as assured, not only because one moved in the current of those forces which promised prosperity through moral character, but because in some manner ill-understood, although reliably certain, Providence thus worked its own purpose. The two are closely related, it is true, for the moral processes were thought to be, in the nature of things, the spiritual laws by which Providence operates. The danger was that so facile a transition could be made to the inscrutable element in providential direction which, unlike the effect of a given type of conduct, was not amenable to reason or foresight. Even Wesley, ever insistent upon thinking in moral terms, was constrained to admit that "a man may possibly be rich, without any fault of his, by an overrruling Providence preventing his own choice."[1]

The obvious deduction from the view that there is a divine and compelling power to account for success in the economic world was that success is itself a mark of divine approval. In that case the existence of class distinctions on economic grounds would come to be regarded, if logically viewed, as determined by Providence. In the early societies the equalitarian mood was far too strong to give such a view any meaning. With Wesley,

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 369.

inherited riches emphatically carried no such implication, and earned wealth was insistently set in an ethical perspective. His theory of the disposition of money and its ownership dissolved that justification for the privileges of wealth. The other extreme, the problem of poverty, is a still better case in point. It illustrates the minor rôle in which Providence was originally cast. Like other political, economic and philanthropic questions, poverty was approached in a moral and practical mood. According to the generally accepted views of the period it was due to one or more of three causes: (1) economic necessity, which meant that there could not be enough produced to enable the entire community to live in comfort, and that therefore, while a few were to have luxuries, the great mass must be content with at most a bare subsistence standard of consumption. Poverty, in this view, was inescapable, and to those who accepted it the only conclusion possible was that the poor must be disciplined to their wretchedness; (2) where it was not the consequence of a niggardly environment, contemporary opinion was convinced that material distress issued from the depraved natures of the labouring section of the population. The mass of people were poor, it was affirmed, because they were indolent, preferring debauchery and idleness above all else, and being unwilling to work unless compelled to do so by force or physical need; (3) frequently these two were interwoven with a third cause discovered in the will of Providence.

It is significant of a freshness in the outlook of early Wesleyanism that, although no other organized movement was brought so intimately in touch with poverty, none of these typically eighteenth-century judgments found a lodgment either in the pronouncements of its leaders or the temper

of its followers. Economic distress was ascribed to human failure which defeated divine purpose. The consolations of a future recompense as a soporific for present suffering were not brought into the foreground by Wesleyans until the period of the French Revolution. Rather the causes of poverty were formulated in a way that placed the responsibility upon the entire community, not upon a single class. The first was an inequitable consumption of the products of industry, which afforded luxuries to the few, while necessities were denied the many. This is basically immoral, it was held, because it is an illegitimate use of that which belongs to God, who has designed it for the community. The doctrine of ownership asserted that anything above reasonable necessities must in justice be devoted to those whose needs constituted a sufficient claim on the community. The second cause of poverty was held to be an absence of the industrial virtues among all classes. If anything, the poor were superior to the rich in this respect. Sloth was the inescapable concomitant of luxury. The apparent indolence of the poor was held to be due less to their innate corruption than to the paralysing effects of injustice. "That common objection, 'They are poor only because they are idle,'" said Wesley, is "wickedly, devilishly false."[1] The solution of the problem of poverty, therefore, seemed relatively simple in outline. Wesley summed it up on one occasion when distress was acutely pressing throughout the community: let everyone avoid luxuries; let everyone work; provide employment for all. Wesleyans manifested no small interest in meeting all three of these conditions. However, it was added, the solution is presumptive of a kind of character that is produced under the guidance of the Christian ethic

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iv., pp. 52, 54.

and therefore the community could not be expected to subject it to a thorough test. Practical genius and moral principle kept Providence in the background during Wesley's leadership. If that ethical emphasis were weakened, however, a rigorous, divine ordination would inevitably move to the front and then serve to justify distinctions of class which were economic in their origin. It remained for many of Wesley's successors to turn to that very shift of emphasis.

This statement of the revival's social theory, with its compromises and contradictions, displays a development of historic ideas transmuted in the experience of an age. The significant question, however, relates to what those ideas meant to, and how far they influenced the conduct of, the individual members of the societies in the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF THE ECONOMIC VIRTUES

An analysis of the population groups from which Methodism drew its membership indicates that the movement concentrated upon the very section of the community which was increasingly being drawn into the industrial processes. The rural groups were less accessible and, besides, they were less isolated from the Establishment, with which even an appearance of conflict was avoided. It was part of the official strategy of the revival under Wesley to focus the new propaganda where the largest number of unattached people could be reached and where the discipline of a regulated organization would give permanence to the work.[1] The centripetal forces of industrial concentration were not, of course, in full effect until the late decades of the century, and there were many rural societies, especially in the vicinity of the larger centres of population. It remains that, as in certain of the southern counties, the early Wesleyans left "unvisited most of the purely agricultural regions," with their "sparse peasant population, bound to their field work."[2] They dealt mainly with industrial labourers like the miners, the iron-workers, weavers, skilled artisans, and the day-labourers of the towns. Workers who migrated to the centres where economic opportunity offered a livelihood constituted

[1] *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr Wesley and Others. From the Year 1744 to the Year 1789*, p. 4. London, 1789.

[2] W. W. Pocock, *A Sketch of the History of Wesleyan Methodism in some of the Southern Counties of England*, p. 3.

the "very social material Methodism was wont to lay hold upon." [1] Unbound to the old steadying community obligations and "being free from religious restrictions" they were a virgin field for the new teaching. Consequently, large sections of the "manufacturing population . . . heartily embraced the doctrines of Methodism." [2]

It is, indeed, indicative of the intimate interrelationship of the revival forces and the economic developments of the century that a correlation appears between the location of new industrial prosperity and the success of the most important Methodist societies. A contemporary Methodist observed pointedly that "when there is little trade there is seldom much increase in religion." [3] It is evident, of course, that the effect of industrial enterprise in congregating people together into new communities presented the revival with its best opportunities,[4] but beyond that the fact is made clear that in spirit the affinity of the economic and religious movements was so close that the vitality of one injected itself into the other.

1. *Effect of Methodism upon Workmen*

All the available testimony, both from observant contemporaries and from the biographical evidence of early Methodists, unites in describing the notable degree in which the revival bred its economic teaching into the habits of its followers. An examination of extant class lists reveals that the labouring population constituted its largest single class of followers. They came to exemplify the Wesleyan economic discipline with a uniqueness that

[1] W. H. Thompson, *Early Chapters in Hull Methodism*, pp. 40-41.
[2] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, p. 51.
[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xv., p. 220.
[4] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, p. 57.

singled them out as a type of worker's character. This was unavoidable, since the influence of Methodism on conduct was obviously its main effect,[1] and the moral consequences of the "experience" were just those traits of industrial character which were most desirable in employed workers. The most persistent charge levelled at the "labouring poor" in the eighteenth century had been their improvidence and untrustworthiness, their carelessness of their own welfare. A Manchester philanthropist, in 1755, had described the class as having "an abject mind . . . a mean, sordid spirit, which prevents all attempts of bettering their condition. They are so familiarized to filth and rags as renders them in a manner natural; and have so little sense of decency as hardly to allow a wish for it a place in their hearts"—a hopeless condition, it was pointed out, which none of the many existing charitable agencies had been able to correct.[2] Wesleyanism addressed itself more effectively to the solution of this specific social problem than any other force in the eighteenth century, because, whatever else it sought, a rehabilitation of character was its first and foremost objective. "Many thousands now living in the manufacturing towns," declared a pamphleteer in a typical opinion, "before they heard the Methodists . . . were supplied by their parishes," [3] but after coming under the influence of the movement they acquired self-respect that made them repel the very suggestion of public aid.[4] It is

[1] John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, pp. 120-121. London, 1791.

[2] John Clayton, M.A., *Friendly Advice to the Poor*, etc., quoted by L. Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists*, pp. 52-53.

[3] Matthew Lumb, *A Few Animadversions, upon a Pamphlet, entitled "An Earnest and Affectionate Address to the People called Methodists,"* etc., p. 48. Skepton, 1804.

[4] Richard Chew, *James Everett*, p. 9.

true that the use of religious teaching had been invoked traditionally to police the labouring poor for the advertised purpose of relieving the rates and securing orderliness. The poor, it was held, were incapable of responding to "refined persuasions"—a criticism that was extended to the poor Methodists.[1] There was a notable difference, however, between the temper of the approach of Wesleyanism and the earlier enterprises. If Methodism did "more for the relief of the poor, by prompting them to support themselves, than all the legislative enactments in operation," it was also precisely because it fostered "a spirit of manly independence."[2] The manner in which the revival teaching fused religion and economic interests gauges the thoroughness with which that spirit was inculcated.

The earliest opposition to Methodism on the familiar ground that "the labour of the inferior people is the great source of national prosperity"[3] was, therefore, soon converted into an argument supporting the new programme, since "the mechanical and labouring classes of society, whose prudence and virtue are of the most essential importance to the strength and prosperity of a nation, so far as they have embraced the doctrines and imbibed the spirit of the Methodists, have been saved from that profligacy of manners, from idleness, dissipation and extravagance."[4] Thereafter it became a reiterated note in the apologetic which sought to prove the positive value of Wesleyanism to the community, to appeal to those

[1] Latham Wainewright, *Observations on the Doctrine*, etc., pp. 18-19.
[2] Thomas Wood, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late Mr James Bundy*, p. 58.
[3] *Common Sense*, p. 19, April 1739.
[4] John Hill, *A Vindication of the Methodists in the Societies of the Late Rev. John Wesley*.

economic results which were so plain that they were irrefutable. "General observation is the best argument in favour of the influence of Methodism on the habits of industry. Look into almost every city, town and village and you . . . will be furnished with a sufficient refutation" of any doubt, affirmed a friendly defender.[1] Methodist preachers were welcomed, in consequence, for the sake of the effect of their preaching upon labourers. After such a visit to one parish, inquiry was made as to "whether they were of the opinion that any good had been done, or was likely to result from it? They answered, that they saw a wonderful alteration in their workmen, and others, and begged that the favour might be continued."[2] It was, therefore, confidently asserted that "the constant attenders on this new model of worship . . . are more industrious in their trade and other occupations, and maintain their families better than ever they did before."[3] The supreme economic virtue of industriousness was being bred into the fibre of Methodist character and endowed with a moral tone by an intense emotional experience. The personal testimony of a humble Methodist exemplifies the resulting type. "I determined that the business of my station should be done as well as it was in my power, and with all possible dispatch. I found by this method I could do far more work in a day than I had done before, and have plenty of time for all the means of grace. . . . Idleness and religion can never be reconciled together."[4] In the fervour of such testimony

[1] James Everett, *Remarks on a Pamphlet, lately circulated by the Rev. Edmund Paley*, etc., p. 21.

[2] *Idem*, *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester and its Vicinity*, vol. i., p. 169.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[4] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xvi., 1793, "Experience of James Hall, by Himself," p. 66.

there is made clear the felt central importance of the economic virtues.

No single feature of this transformation of the moral character of the labouring group was more commented upon than the abrupt disappearance of drunkenness. It had been so long associated with the habits of a large class that even repressive police measures were but half-hearted. Foreign observers were struck with amazement by the ubiquitous alehouse and its sotted regiments. In particular the rising manufacturers felt the brunt of its consequences. No complaint was more universal than the inability to depend upon workers, who could not be found when wanted or trusted with responsibility when at work, on account of a proneness to drunkenness.[1] Methodism accorded violent treatment to the habit. Drunkenness was not only proscribed, but any offenders were summarily excluded from the societies. The detailed record of actual discipline proves how literally the rule of expulsion for excessive drinking was administered. The result was acclaimed by friends and opponents of the new societies. "Persons were led to abstain from opposition to a movement which at any rate was diminishing the drunkenness, impurity, and profaneness of the country."[2] The chapel was substituted for the alehouse as the integrator of interests. The enthusiasm engendered at the meeting persisted into the working day. "Many families that used to be sotting and quarrelling at alehouses in the evenings," disabling them for the next day, "now after work, instead of spending part of their day's earnings at the Ale-house, do hear the preaching, and hereby their hearts are made so glad that

[1] *E.g.* John Lord, *Capital and Steam Power*; S. Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers* (2nd ed.), iv., pp. 226-227.

[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 97.

they can rise at five to hear the Word, and go chearfully [*sic*] to work at six, and are the better husbands on all accounts," [1] is a description of one of the earliest effects of the movement which impressed contemporaries. The money which formerly poured into the pockets of the alehouse-keepers added to the increased earning power of sober workers not only provided sufficient to make " many uncomfortable families . . . truly happy " but also to build the preaching houses,[2] where the convert found " a stimulus . . . not less powerful than what he formerly sought at the alehouse," and one that brought " with it no morning headache and after-reckoning." This contributed to what was more important than all else—that is, that one's " pride is gratified in the consequence which he obtains by being an acknowledged member of a community." [3] No small part of the riotous opposition which the struggling societies encountered had been instigated by alehouse-keepers " who complained of the loss of their customers," by the work of the new preaching. Their antagonism was justified.[4]

The thoroughness with which the societies' doctrine of work was infused into the labouring group of their membership proceededd efinitely from the religious motive. No other source could have furnished the driving force of a kind of conduct which established more clearly than any argument the economic consequence of the revival. If it impinged upon the industrial revolution at no other point, its contribution to the ideal labourer's mentality is undebatable. Industriousness was not merely suggested

[1] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. vi., p. 48, quoting "A Letter from a Private Person." 1743.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xiii., p. 405, 1790.

[3] Anonymous, *Methodism Exposed, with the History and Tendency of that Sect*, pp. 7-8.

[4] J. Norton Dickons, *The Bradford Antiquary*, p. 76.

as a duty to which Methodists must discipline themselves, it was woven into the doctrine of moralt ransformation so as to warrant the view that the religious experience would itself alter the felt disposition towards labour, changing the bent to sloth into an impulse to work. "Worldly business was a burden to me," testified a Methodist to Wesley, "but He Whom my soul loveth has removed that also. . . . He made me willing to labour, and keeps me in perfect peace, while thus employed." [1] This spirit infected men and women in the humblest occupations as well as those which were rated a higher standing. They brought to their work an habitual seriousness of purpose. Like the Quakers, wrote a Methodist merchant in Hull, they "are distinguished by their abstraction from the fashionable gaieties of life, by their dislike of dissipating amusements, and by the general gravity and sobriety of their conduct." [2] To outsiders it appeared that this was to make life a sombre and unattractive affair, composed of dreary society meetings and hard work. Certainly there was force to the criticism in superficial appearance. Yet it failed to penetrate into the characteristic mentality of the Methodist who, to the criticism that his habits must burden him with a most uncomfortable existence, replied: "No, not so truly. . . . Christians of all men in the world are the most happy." [3] The Methodist worked and lived austerely, and found satisfaction in it. He worked in the mood of devotion.

In fact, the intensity with which Methodist workers everywhere undertook to live in that mood constrained

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. ix., pp. 396-397, "Letter from Mr Joseph Marshall of Birr," 1786.

[2] John Hill, *A Vindication of the Methodists in the Societies of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, p. 30.

[3] Anonymous, *A Dialogue between One who calls himself a Churchman and One who is called a Methodist*, p. 8. London, 1770.

them to use their occupations as opportunities for propaganda. "I daily reproved all that sinned in the Work where I was," [1] is a testimony that makes clear the pious mood and the sense of heavy responsibility which workmen mixed with their labour. Many combined their usual occupations with intensive work in the local society. "His time had been divided between his daily business and saving souls" [2] is a description of thousands of humble Methodists. A public journal, struck with indignation by a multitude of working men undertaking to be spiritual leaders, complained that "almost every man who could hammer out a chapter in the Bible had turned an expounder of the Scripture," [3] and that seemed, on the face of it, an obvious and serious loss to industry. The "lowest mechanic or labourer in his lowly cottage" [4] strove with equal zeal at both tasks. Sheer association of religious zeal and daily work made it natural that the economic ideal should acquire meaning and power:

> "Where weavers expound as they sit at the loom,
> Where mechanics, inspired, the Gospel explain,
> And weave at a text as well as a chain." [5]

Such rankly inappropriate conduct was highly offensive to contemporaries. But it was an offence that inevitably came to be tempered with respect when the poor preachers were more intimately known. Smollett made Mr Bramble say of the Methodist Humphry Clinker: "He has commended

[1] *Extract from the Journal of John Nelson* (17th ed.), p. 25. New York.

[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, pp. 202-203.

[3] Quoted from *Weekly Miscellany*, Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. i., p. 251.

[4] William Hatton, *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of Local Preaching among the Methodists*, p. 33.

[5] Stephen Tuck, *Wesleyan Methodism in Frome*, p. 11.

himself to the whole of our family by his talents of preaching, praying and singing psalms, which he exercises with such effect. If there were anything like affectation or hypocrisy in this excess of religion, I would not keep him in my service, but so far as I can observe, the fellow's character is downright simplicity, warmed with a kind of enthusiasm, which renders him susceptible of gratitude and attachment to his benefactors." [1] Methodist workmen felt no self-consciousness in undertaking to persuade even their masters to become Methodists,[2] just as Methodist masters often led their employees to enter the societies,[3] not by the compulsion of prestige but by a sincere personal zeal that dissolved the restraints of position.

This union of religious enthusiasm, Puritan austerity and the sanctification of work sunk deeply into the character of the faithful member of the new group. Even when the earlier days of enforced frugality had given way to relative ease and affluence, the old attitude often persisted. At Macclesfield one of the earliest Methodists, who could not even write but had acquired a "moderate affluence," "persisted in wearing a green apron as he had been long accustomed," [4] while at Congleton it was not without the energetic interposition of the preacher's authority that the weavers of the society were convinced that "they could, during the Lord's Day, appear in public without their aprons, and still not be 'high-minded' or conformed to the world." [5]

[1] J. Albert Swallow, *Methodism in the Light of the English Literature of the Last Century*, pp. 148-149. Leipzig, 1895.
[2] James Hargreaves, *The Life and Memoir of the Late Rev. John Hurst*, p. 58.
[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. vi., p. 40.
[4] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 253.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

The eighteenth century was not slow to recognize the effect of Wesleyanism on the labouring section of the community. Methodists and non-Methodists, friendly observers and unfriendly critics all bore witness to the making of self-respecting, trustworthy and orderly working men in all the industrial centres and in practically all the important industries. "To you," declared Priestley in "An Address to the Methodists," "is the civilization, the industry and sobriety of great numbers of the labouring part of the community owing." [1] The earliest results of the revival were manifested among the miners, to whom Wesley and his preachers devoted continuous and special attention during the entire period. The witness before the Select Committee on Accidents in Mines in 1835 who credited the Methodists with the great changes in the character of the Cornwall miners merely repeated a fact of common knowledge. Richard Warner, thirty years earlier, had appraised the work of the revival among Cornish miners. The Methodists, he said, "have perseveringly taught, gradually reclaimed, and at length I almost venture to say completely reformed a large body of men" otherwise immersed in "the grossest moral turpitude." [2] The reformation of the rude and illiterate, particularly in Somersetshire among the colliers, was notorious.[3] From widely separated districts of the kingdom the same effect was reported. "The change that took place was rapid and extensive. The moment they became religious their brutality subsided. In a few years many thousands of the colliers became acquainted with the principles of religion, and the consequent reformation of

[1] Joseph Priestley, *Original Letters by the Rev. John Wesley*, etc., pp. xvii-xviii.

[2] Richard Warner, *A Tour through Cornwall*, pp. 297-303.

[3] Stephen Tuck, *Methodism in Frome*, p. 24.

manners was more general and more complete than those who knew them before could have supposed practicable. Kingswood, Cornwall and the neighbourhood of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in point of decency and morality among the labouring people, had been nearly upon a par; and it is remarkable that in each of these places Methodism has been particularly successful."[1] Such was the judgment of a critical observer of the eighteenth century.

The record of the influence of the movement in the other industrial centres is intimately bound up with a different set of factors: new opportunity for initiative, economic improvement and social mobility. Nevertheless, the reputation of the revival's influence in promoting the industrial virtues in the manufacturing towns was no less explicit. "Most of our society" in Nottingham, wrote Wesley, "are the lower class, chiefly employed in the stocking manufacture, yet there is generally an uncommon gentleness and sweetness in their temper, and some elegance in their behaviour."[2] It is true that Wesley himself was biased in favour of the poor, but his credible testimony is in marked contrast to the contemporary estimate of working-class irresponsibility. It was "particularly in the great manufacturing towns"[3] that the preaching of Methodism had revealed its full effect in creating a standard of self-respecting conduct. "Yet if any doubt it," declared an official apologist of the movement in 1785, of achievements already recorded, "let them go to Kingswood and Cornwall; let them go to Newcastle, Coleford,

[1] John Hampson, *Memoirs of John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 113.

[2] "G. H. H.," *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham*, etc., p. 43.

[3] Samuel Clapham, *How far Methodism conduces to the Interests of Christianity, and the Welfare of Society*, etc., p. 16.

Wednesbury and Whitehaven; let them go to Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool; let them go to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Chester; let them go to Norwich, Bath and Bristol—and they will soon be satisfied that multitudes," once dissolute and undependable, "are now sober, holy, Christian men." [1]

Even children employed in factories, who had the reputation of being "the most profligate in the town," [2] were transformed by contact with Methodist influences.[3] Methodist apprentices were said to be the most dependable that could be secured.[4] The effect of the movement upon the desirability of tenants in the more rural districts was reported repeatedly.[5] Even in the army and the navy Methodist soldiers and sailors were commended for their steadiness and reliability. "Not infrequently officers gladly welcomed the Methodist preachers to their camps and barracks," [6] because, it was said, they "had no trouble with the Methodist soldiers, but enough with others" [7]; while it was boasted that Methodist sailors on Nelson's ship *Victory* gained the distinction of being "the best sailors on the ship." [8] The character of servants who were originally persecuted for their adherence to the new sect was such that it dissolved prejudice against the societies,[9] and many masters and mistresses, "though

[1] Thomas Olivers, *A Defence of Methodism*, etc., p. 28.
[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. vii., p. 106, 1784.
[3] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 352.
[4] F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, p. 204; W. Pilkington, *The Makers of Wesleyan Methodism in Preston*, p. 143.
[5] Alexander Stewart and George Revington, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Rev. Adam Averill*, p. 88; George Lester, *Grimsby Methodism and the Wesleys in Lincolnshire*, p. 110.
[6] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, p. 59.
[7] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. iv., p. 470, 1781.
[8] Jonathan Crowther, *The Methodist Manual*, p. 193.
[9] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., pp. 70-71.

not friendly to religion, had wisdom enough to prefer "[1] servants whose Methodism was a guarantee of their trustworthiness. Even when the religious peculiarity of Methodists was distasteful its desirable consequences overruled the initial repugnance of employers. "I like him for a workman," it was said of a pious society member, "but I hate his religion."[2]

The value of this type of character to the industrial and commercial community received wide recognition in a still more emphatic way. In the process of increasing social mobility, to which Wesleyanism made so large a contribution, posts of responsibility were often an intermediate stage to positions of economic independence and power.[3] In an expanding industrial movement employers were quick to realize the advantage of appointing strict members of the societies to positions of trust. "Actuated by interest," affirmed a contemporary historian of the Methodist movement, "proprietors of factories . . . chose sober and pious men for their foremen and overlookers."[4] Sir Robert Peel the elder is reported to have testified in 1787: "I have left most of my works in Lancashire under the management of Methodists and they serve me excellently well."[5] The superintendent of "the most extensive manufactory of linen cloths, checks, etc.," in Manchester in 1786 was, at the same time, a leading local preacher.[6] The prominence which Methodists achieved in the iron industry throughout the

[1] George Barratt, *Recollections of Methodism and Methodists in the City of Lincoln*, p. 29.
[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. iii., p. 318, 1780.
[3] *E.g.* George Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*.
[4] Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism*, etc., p. 37.
[5] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 499.
[6] William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 25.

country [1] was accounted for by that same type of character which made ironmasters disposed to prefer Wesleyans when appointing foremen. As early as 1755 a miniature community of Methodists under "a serious man" was imported to one district to found an ironworks.[2] On a large scale the same preference was being repeated forty years later, when a prominent resident complained that promoters had "brought a lot of Methodists into the neighbourhood," [3] for the express purpose of founding a branch of the iron industry. Birmingham capitalists selected a Methodist, highly esteemed for the "faithful discharge of every relative and religious duty," to superintend "a large copper concern." [4] The owners of a Derbyshire lead mine, exasperated by a succession of agents who "had proved unfaithful to their trust," sought the leader of a Methodist society. "The whole of the partners proved him to be a man of sterling integrity, and were soon convinced that it was to their interest to preserve such a valuable acquisition to their concern." [5] The Methodist who was said to have benefited the casks of beer belonging to his employer, because he "prayed behind every one of them," [6] may have seemed eccentric, but his loyalty and industriousness made him sought after by other brewery owners to superintend their plants. One of the most common vocations among early Wesleyans was

[1] T. S. Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 220-223.

[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iv., p. 109.

[3] M. G. Habershon, *Chapeltown Researches*, etc., pp. 139-142.

[4] J. Janion, sen., *Some Account of the Introduction of Methodism into the City, and some parts of the County of Chester*, p. 49; also John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 348.

[5] James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield*, pp. 221-222.

[6] Thomas Wood, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late Mr James Bundy*.

the position of trusted personal agent to a man of property. Such was the father of Richard Oastler,[1] disinherited by his father for a connection with Methodism. It is not without significance that these notably able men were so frequently local preachers in the societies.[2]

2. *Effect of Methodism in stimulating Economic Enterprise*

The service of the revival's forces in moulding the qualities of industrial character did not, however, exhaust the function which they performed to the economic community. It may even be said that up to this point the consequences produced had significance of an economic order only incidentally, and that little is revealed regarding the degree in which Wesley's teaching about the pursuit of economic ends was actually embodied in the life of the typical Methodist. In this wider field, moreover, the question involves new considerations, such as a larger economic opportunity, the inevitable question of new standards of consumption, the extent to which economic values were regarded as a legitimate search, the achievements of Methodists in the industrial community, and the relation of any wealth that may have been acquired in the process to the old outlook which had come to be regarded as normal among the societies. Here it is necessary to depend primarily upon data which does not permit statistical treatment. Judgment must be made less upon a census of units than the accumulative evidence of as many sources of testimony as it is possible to discover. Contemporary records, issuing both from within and from outside the movement, display a frank attentiveness to

[1] *D.N.B.*, vol. xli., p. 293.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xvi. (1793), "Experience of James Hall," p. 69; also J. Janion, sen., *Methodism in Chester*, p. 38.

economic activities, so that a multitude of unorganized but pertinent facts is available. This is particularly true of an extraordinary mass of biographical material which the revival has bequeathed in permanent form to posterity. The aspects of it that concern the economic life loom large and often manifest an interest so central that even in recounting it early Methodist narrators revealed a sense of pride in the fact that the movement could produce so impressive a record of material achievement.

The view that emerges from an examination of the rôle played by the economic teachings of the revival is not a fixed but a changing picture, in which a conflict of motives and values becomes increasingly apparent. In the course of time one section of the revival's ideas which proved more palatable tended to monopolize attention and to crowd out ideas which were becoming distasteful. In doing so the typical Wesleyan attitude was broken up, for its ideas about the gaining of wealth were integral to those relating to its disposition. Nevertheless, for the most part, the records produce a clear picture of the remarkable degree to which the individual members of the early societies succeeded in reproducing the outlook and evaluations which had been detailed with considerable care by the various leaders of the movement, and especially by Wesley.

(a) *Initiative and the Mood of Piety.* — Naturally, in a situation where increasing economic opportunity and the impulse to social change were moulding the entire community by their potent influence, the minds of Methodists would constitute fertile ground for the injunction which bade them, "Gain all you can." It is not surprising, then, to find that members of the societies everywhere devoted themselves to the activities of business enterprise with vigour and a stern seriousness. One

seeks in vain to find evidence that concern for the soul's welfare was any barrier to a fervent interest in the affairs of the shop or factory or market-place. The frank and full acceptance of the pursuit of economic ends was everywhere accorded the stamp of approval. Nevertheless, it would be a perversion of the entire picture to imagine that during this earliest period of the movement the pursuit of material gain was felt to be an end having its own justification. It must be emphasized, if one is to catch the sense of the movement, that it was the ethical implication of the economic teaching of Wesley and his associates that dominated the practice of his followers. The economic aims exalted so pointedly in teaching and embodied so widely in experience must be seen in the context of a religious and moral outlook if they are to be understood in an undistorted perspective.

The mood in which economic pursuits were undertaken was, therefore, that of a pious and exacting responsibility. It was no approval of the self-indulgent, frivolous activities of other men whose actions were not ordered with reference to a divine purpose, to mix in the affairs of business. The Methodist undertook to move constantly in surroundings of which he could not approve, but always in the mood of a divine obligation. The only way that he could escape contamination was by "carrying religion into the world, and at the same time keeping the world out of religion."[1] In attempting thus to infuse daily work with the atmosphere of the chapel there was nurtured an outlook which organized all of the individual's energies into a working unity. The task was to maintain a distinctive temper, unimpaired by the unfriendly influences of

[1] *A Memoir of Mr William Carvosso, Sixty Years a Class-Leader: Written by Himself and Edited by his Son*, pp. 59-61.

surrounding distractions. "When, in the ordinary course of business, I was obliged to be with those from morning to night who knew not these things, and sometimes with such as were despisers thereof," wrote a typical Methodist, "yet my communion with God was uninterrupted; and I was often, even then, almost as happy in Him as I could be."[1] A man's undertaking might be arduous and exacting, but a true Methodist was determined "to realize, amidst the toils and cares of business, the sufficiency of His grace to keep his soul in peace."[2] Contemporaries found so great an intensity of spirit and so ubiquitous an interest in religion a little irritating. "We might almost imagine that religion, or what in their vocabulary is equivalent to it, Methodism, ought to afford the only topic of conversation among mankind,"[3] complained a critic. But what was only an exasperation to others was the very breath of life to these men who engaged in a normally secular calling, but brought with them the fervour of a divine mission. Such a consciousness prompted an early Methodist to explain the success of his business ventures by pointing out that "we . . . laid all our concerns daily before the Lord."[4] This was to go beyond the form of words and take literally the doctrine of divine partnership. It marks a source of the strength of purpose which distinguished many of these pious men of industry. They achieved a feeling of divine intimacy that was, in the eyes of some of their critics, nothing less than sacrilegious. It was a characteristic mood which a Bristol Methodist

[1] Henry Moore, *An Account of the Lord's Dealings with Thomas Rutherford: The Greater Part Written by Himself*, p. 34.

[2] William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 26.

[3] Latham Wainewright, *Observations on the Doctrine, Discipline and Manners of the Wesleyan Methodists*, etc., p. 157.

[4] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, p. 50.

revealed of whom it was said that " in the morning, after he had seen every man in his proper station, he usually retired to some secret place of prayer, intreating the blessing of God on himself as well as the other men." [1]

Perhaps nothing demonstrates more happily the intimate relation that existed between the occupations which these men engaged in and their religious purposes, than the extent to which many of them devoted a large measure of their time to the work of the societies. They not only filled the local offices of class leaders and trustees, but were frequently zealous local preachers, actively engaged in extending the work of the revival throughout the countryside by unremitting toil and singular devotion. This was true of all groups and sections, from the humble but independent farmer [2] to prosperous cotton manufacturers.[3]

An exacting, and sometimes it seemed even super-sensitive, standard of ethical conduct was accordingly linked with the Methodist's characteristic personal austerity to condition his search for economic gain. It obviously constituted a major factor in the economic consequences of the revival, a fact contemporaries were quick to recognize. No tiresome catalogue of the diverse forms which the moral outlook assumed could carry one inside the mind of the typical Methodist. It varied with the circumstances, but revealed a single attitude dictated by the Puritan temper of the revival experience. Where that outlook conflicted with activity of the economic life, " they gave up many temporal advantages for conscience sake." [4] Methodist shopkeepers refused to desecrate the

[1] Thomas Wood, *A Biographical Sketch of James Bundy*.
[2] *Life of Samuel Drew*, by his Eldest Son.
[3] A. J. French, *The Life of John Birchenall*, pp. 1-2.
[4] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, p. 50.

evangelical Sabbath, preferring to accept the financial loss, if necessary, to any gain which might accrue by such a violation of their stern code.[1] Business ventures incapable of securing moral approval were promptly abandoned,[2] whether as in the profitable practice of smuggling[3] or dealing in hops, where, "although the sacrifice was great in losing many valuable customers,"[4] there was a felt clash with the ethical demands of the new religious experience. There was allowed here, it is true, a certain latitude of judgment. Wesley had taught that no man was to do what he himself found injurious. But the same basic attitude of moral rigidity is discoverable even when, as was often the case, Methodists were in one way or another connected with the liquor trade. A highly respected Methodist woman who kept an inn "would never permit excess drinking," and "such an influence did she possess and maintain, that if a stranger, unused to such a rule and order, ignorantly infringed, he was checked and informed of the consequences by his companions."[5]

The personal austerity and the rigid moral code by which the Methodist ordered his conduct in his business activities acquired the force of a settled reputation. To be distinguished for "his honesty, his fidelity and adherence to religion in the transaction of his temporal affairs"[6] was a description which within the societies possessed the

[1] J. U. Walker, *Methodism in Halifax*, etc., p. 173; William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 10.

[2] James Lackington, *Memoirs*, etc., pp. 168-169; William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 13.

[3] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xxiv. (1801), p. 148, "The Experience of Mr R. Miller," by Self.

[4] Samuel Dunn, *Memoirs of Mr Thomas Tatham*, p. 76.

[5] Richard Skinner, *Memoirs of Mrs Sarah Butler*, p. 21.

[6] Joshua Fielden, *A Sermon . . . occasioned by the Death of Mr Francis Fisher*, pp. 26-27.

widest application. Wild and unstable in his youth, "after he joined the Methodist society he became steady and even exemplary" in his business habits, is a brief biography of many members of the societies.[1] The "practical effects" of the Gospel in a tradesman, it was explained, were "strict integrity and conscientiousness."[2] It was to be regarded as a test and justification of one's religious profession that "in his business . . . he was punctual, conscientious, and honourable."[3]

Such characters "commanded the respect of all with whom" they were associated.[4] It is not remarkable that in the commercial situation of the community the term Methodist came to be altered from one of opprobrium to one of respect. "He is one of the people called Methodist; and I believe he would not tell a falsehood, or do a dishonest action, to gain the world," was an impression voiced by an outsider.[5] It was with this acknowledged reputation for business integrity in mind that one of the Methodist leaders in 1792 exclaimed: "How few of them ever failed in business!" and therein revealed how much pride the societies took in maintaining their reputation in the world of industry and trade. This harmonious union of the religious and economic tempers was illustrated by the testimony of one prospering Methodist in describing his own habits: "I therefore took for my motto," he said, "'not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' and I determined to divide each day into certain portions. . . . Accordingly, I rose at five,

[1] Alexander Strachan, *The Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*, p. 42.
[2] *Memoirs of Mrs Eliza Ann Foster*, p. 1.
[3] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, pp. xi-xii.
[4] George Wall, *A Sermon occasioned by the Death of Mr John Shore*.
[5] W. P. Burgess, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Burgess*, p. 29.

and spent an hour with God. From six to four I devoted to business, allowing myself frequently a few minutes of secret prayer. In which ten hours, besides managing my little business, I set myself to earn ten shillings; and this I did with great ease. From four to ten I made sacred to religious purposes." [1] To an exacting business ethic and "unremitting industry" [2] was added a Puritan plainness "in their business transaction and social habits." [3] It was one of the fascinating anomalies of their ambition that while early Methodists engaged in the most earthly of pursuits, they sought so persistently to avoid any "conformity to the world." [4]

(b) *Correlation of Religion and Business Success.*—This kind of character was admirably suited to engage in economic pursuits with an initial advantage over other men less persistent, less rigorously self-controlled, and unwilling to be content with a simple and plain standard of life. Naturally it is not uniformly true that Methodists made a success of every business venture. Moreover, the period covered by this first stage of the revival probably witnessed a rising standard of living that was fairly general and a marked increase in economic opportunity throughout the community. It was, of course, unjustified to assume, as did certain eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers, that there were no other important factors to account for the material prosperity of members of the new societies than personal character. The fallacy, so obvious now, was partly justifiable, however, in the case

[1] *The Life of Mr Henry Longden*, etc., pp. 55-56.

[2] Samuel Drew, *Wesleyan Local Preachers*, p. 23. Newcastle, 1843.

[3] John Ward, *Historical Sketches of the Rise and Progress of Methodism in Bingley*, p. 52.

[4] Samuel Dunn, *Memoirs of Mr Thomas Tatham, and of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham*, pp. 31, 72.

of contemporary commentators, because commonly they were witnessing the transformation in economic status of men who started with few observable assets and whose success, therefore, appeared to be due solely to their own efforts. In point of fact, the unsuspected forces of the vast economic development were moulding the entire community, but the favourable historical coincidence of native tendencies within the revival and the environment produced important consequences for the status of the new class of prospering Methodists. How far was there a correlation between the Wesleyan movement and economic prosperity?

The course of events seemed to demonstrate conclusively that there was a direct relation between the Methodist discipline of character and material success. "Methodism has powerfully tended to improve those who have embraced it," declared a prominent contemporary appraiser. "This has happened naturally and almost necessarily,"[1] so that "it is a fact, which cannot with truth be denied, that the Methodists in general are more rich than they were before they became such."[2] One of the earliest historians of the movement, who separated from it when Wesley failed to include his name among the ruling Legal Hundred, described the process. Persons "could neither be admitted, nor continued in the societies," whose moral character was unsatisfactory. "The consequence was highly advantageous. . . . Multitudes who in extravagance and dissipation had vied, as much as possible, with their superiors, and had been accustomed to spend their wages in alehouses and cockpits, and to leave their families to pine in indigence at home, were

[1] Jonathan Crowther, *The Methodist Manual*, p. 214.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 342.

instructed to make provision for their support. Habits of industry and frugality brought peace and plenty to their habitations. Instead of pawning and borrowing, they were gradually enabled, not only to lend, but to give liberally to the necessities of others. . . . It remains only to add, that the increase of industry and sobriety has been attended with the best influence on their affairs: so that, notwithstanding their contributions to charities of all kinds, and their maintenance of such a number of preachers, they are visibly increasing in wealth; and that, not by speculation and fraud, but by their attention to business, and their freedom from the dissipation and luxury."[1] The claim that Methodists were "becoming opulent through the influence of religion on their conduct"[2] was commonly held up as an evidence of the service which the societies continuously and normally performed in the best interests of the temporal community.[3]

These general judgments of the eighteenth-century writers are amply confirmed in the available records of individual achievement. "Religion developed his powers"[4] is constantly reiterated as the decisive factor which opened the way to affluent circumstances. A man borrows five guineas "to begin the potato trade" and "in a few years he made his five guineas into five hundred"[5]; through a small loan another becomes a prosperous cabinetmaker[6]; a local preacher with no initial advantages "prospers in his temporal circumstances" in "the

[1] John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, vol. iii., pp. 116-119.

[2] Valentine Ward, *Miniature of Methodism* (6th ed.), p. 154.

[3] Thomas Olivers, *A Defence of Methodism*, pp. 28-29.

[4] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 214.

[5] J. Janion, sen., *Some Account . . . of Methodism . . . Chester*, pp. 72-73.

[6] J. Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, pp. 64-65.

wholesale ironmongery business "[1]; "a pious, humble, zealous servant of Christ" becomes silversmith to the King[2]; a penniless immigrant to London borrows five pounds from the Society's funds and becomes a wealthy bookseller[3]; "by success in trade" a Methodist "rose to affluence" and was elected Mayor of Hull[4]; a typical Methodist is "first on a dairy farm, then a joiner, then builder, and then coal-merchant," and "he was successful at everything"[5]; while an energetic Methodist woman in Preston commenced business as a mantle-maker and milliner and "all she touched turned to gold."[6] As early as 1763, it was claimed that "in London, Bristol, and most other trading towns," Methodists who were "in business have increased in substance sevenfold, some of them twenty, yea, an hundredfold."[7] It was a process which by its constant repetition came to be regarded in the nature of a formula, as though there were some peculiar potency in Methodist character which was a dependable assurance of success in commercial enterprise.

The records are replete with such instances of the temporal fortunes of individual members, not only, it should be noted, as tradesmen—a calling in which Methodists revealed a singular aptitude—but also in a notable degree in connection with the new processes of manufacture. "We find also thousands of young men," said a prominent Methodist at the end of the century, "who, by virtue and temperance, by industry and

[1] Richard Burdekin, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mr Robert Spence of York*, pp. 15-19.
[2] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, p. 50.
[3] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, pp. 51-53.
[4] Henry B. Ridgaway, *The Life of the Rev. Alfred Cookman*, p. 5.
[5] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 182.
[6] John Taylor, *The Apostles of Fylde Methodism*, p. 14.
[7] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. v., pp. 30-31.

economy, by happy connections and the blessing of God on their labours, have rose from industry to affluence, and now fill the leading situations in commercial life. . . . Happiness and smiling plenty have been diffused through the towns and villages in which their manufactures have succeeded."[1] Leading ironmasters throughout the country were prominent Wesleyans.[2] A Methodist silk-manufacturer at Macclesfield was held in such popular esteem that he was elected mayor of the town of which Wesley wrote, "I . . . find a people still alive to God in spite of swiftly increasing riches."[3] "By diligence and thrift" in the cotton manufacture, another society member "attained a position of respectability and influence."[4] Three of five master-spinners at Stockport who engaged in water-power spinning on a large scale were Wesleyans. "The new social mobility, which was a main factor in the economic development of Stockport, was intimately connected with the emergency of new forces of the religious community."[5]

In fact, so pronounced was the observed correlation between the revival forces and economic prosperity that an unfriendly critic of the eighteenth century claimed he had found the key to the great expansion of Methodism in its economic rewards. "The immediate temporal advantages which people of the lower classes feel as soon as they enter the society," he wrote, "must be numbered among the most efficient causes of its rapid and continual increase."[6] There can be no doubt but

[1] Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism*, etc., p. 36.

[2] T. S. Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*; James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield*, p. 115.

[3] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, pp. 202-203.

[4] A. J. French, *The Life of John Birchenall*, pp. 1-2.

[5] George Unwin, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, p. 40.

[6] Anonymous, *Methodism Exposed, with the History and Tendency of that Sect*, pp. 7-8.

that this did contribute in an important way to the prestige of the movement and to its rapid establishment in the community.

The impetus which the religious forces imparted to the production of wealth is as certain as it was general. But the ethical version of the economic theory for which Wesley stood was most vulnerable at the point where the principle of the use of what is gained was detailed. It is clear that in co-operation with the favouring circumstances, the Methodist discipline and attitude was peculiarly suited to produce prosperous and successful men in the world of trade and business enterprise. How did that altered economic power affect the early attitude regarding the use of money? How earnestly did Methodists apply the doctrine of divine ownership? Did the new wealth tend to create a gulf between the labouring poor and the newly rich? Was it hoarded and bequeathed to children in direct contradiction to the injunction of Wesley? Did it have any important effect upon the official outlook of the societies?

That the doctrine dealing with the use of money was not merely a pious but impracticable abstraction, unrelated to the typical Methodist practice, is established by the extraordinary philanthropic record of the revival, as well as by the attitude towards wealth which individual members displayed. It is convincing testimony to the strength of the religious basis of the movement that the disposition of money was so commonly undertaken in exactly the same spirit of responsibility with which its gain was attempted. A sense of accountability for human need in the community often went hand in hand with an intensely serious feeling that the new prosperity was really the consequence of providential favour, or, as it was phrased by one devout

Methodist, "that Christ had multiplied his little income almost as remarkably as He did the loaves and the fishes."[1] It was the considered judgment of one of Wesley's leading preachers who was unusually well-informed regarding conditions throughout the societies that in respect to the many Methodists who "have rose from industry to affluence, and now fill the leading situations in commercial life . . . their benevolence to the poor . . . has in general corresponded with their increase in wealth."[2] There are, of course, no figures to measure the extent of their benefactions, but there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the numerous testimonies to the attitude of the typical prospering Methodist, at least during the earlier years. "My business prospered more and more . . . I now had money to spare for the support of God's cause and for the relief of God's poor,"[3] is an expressed satisfaction running through the biographies of successful society members. They came to be "distinguished and known . . . by attention to the poor . . . [and] . . . generosity in case of need."[4] Sometimes they gave large proportions of their earnings on principle.[5] Not uncommonly they turned increasingly to benevolent activity, either as part of their daily routine or by retiring from business after securing a sufficient sum to devote the later years of life "to the interest of public charities."[6] The attachment of the Methodists whose economic position was being improved

[1] A. Watmough, *A History of Methodism in the Neighbourhood and City of Lincoln*, p. 46.

[2] Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism*, etc., p. 36.

[3] *The Life of Mr Henry Longden*, pp. 55-56.

[4] Joshua Fielden, *A Sermon . . . occasioned by the Death of Mr Francis Fisher*, pp. 26-27.

[5] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 175.

[6] James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield and its Vicinity*, pp. 170-171.

to the work and welfare of the societies frequently brought them the leadership of the local organization. "Scarcely a prosperous Methodist could be named who did not take an active part in promoting the spiritual work of the" Connexion, records a Methodist local historian.[1] In the course of time this attachment gave particular force to the chapel-building movement, and it became a common event for a Methodist who had gained material success to build a chapel for the society.[2] On the whole, the familiar effect of Methodism "on the temporal concerns of the societies" was not less characteristic, in the judgment of well-balanced and not too friendly contemporary observers, than the corresponding impulse "to give liberally to the necessities of others."[3]

Nevertheless, long before the close of the period under survey, the incompatibility of the material prosperity of members of the societies and the purity of the approved type of Methodist character became evident, with significant consequences for the temper and future of the movement. The injection of an ethical ideal into the realm of economic activity which Wesleyanism frankly attempted reckoned upon a sustained intensity of moral purpose and social affection. If that moral purpose weakened, an insoluble conflict was bound to arise between the approved money-making pursuit and that disposition of the wealth gained which the teaching of the movement required. Wesley saw clearly that the integrity of the enterprise he led was very vitally dependent upon its ability to avoid those divisive desires and evaluations which normally

[1] William Jessop, *Methodism in Rossendale*, etc.

[2] E.g. *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xxiv., p. 148, "Experience of Mr R. Miller"; J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, pp. 51-53; Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 175.

[3] John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, pp. 116-119.

extend themselves in proportion to the possession of economic power. It is only here that it is possible to appraise justly the social theory which was really central to the Wesleyan section of the revival. Wesley was, both in his theory and in his own deliberate example of that theory, at least as revolutionary as Owen and the radicals who later inspired the abhorrence of Wesley's official successors. For he insisted that a roughly gauged but nevertheless real economic equality was the indispensable condition of the health of society. No man was justified in possessing more of the community's material wealth than was necessary to use for his simple needs. "By riches," Wesley explained, "I mean not thousands of pounds, but any more than will procure the conveniences of life."[1] Everything above this, in justice, must be devoted to the needs of society—need conceived juvenilely as the relief of want, to be sure, not as a constructive programme of social welfare to eliminate the basis of distress. Moreover, the mere possession of more than that necessary minimum deflected desire to individual ends that were definitely unsocial and sinful. It undermined the basic attitude of socialmindedness, substituting material for spiritual ends and creating unholy attitudes of desert and social standing among men. Therefore Wesley had persistently and with intensity taught that marked disparities of economic power could not be made consistent with the Christian community. This was really central to his moral attitude, and it was at the same time one of the standards of his political evaluations. His system was bound up with this conclusion. He did not himself seem to realize, it is true, just how revolutionary a position it was. But he insistently reiterated it. It is in this perspective that his frequently

[1] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 456.

repeated affirmation that "the poor are the Christians" is to be understood. This alone gives point to the force of his denunciation of those who accumulated wealth for personal ends, and his warning that he who gains and does not give that gain back to the community is "twofold the son of hell." It makes explicable his passion to die penniless—which he did, in spite of the large sums that accrued to him in the course of his life. But the record of the growing prosperity of Methodists all over England is the story of the progressive rejection of the principle and the gradual disappearance of the social evaluations which it represented.

This rather violent theory, which was also a very practical judgment, was not wholly unworkable in the earliest stages of the movement. The virile freshness of its enthusiasm and the relative economic level of the membership in the societies made the acquisitive motive and the desire for social prestige weak in their compulsion. Among Methodists and in the large community, the rate of social mobility had not yet been greatly accelerated, as it was to be speeded up with the extension of the factory movement. In any event, a working equivalent to the doctrine of moral ownership and the teaching about disposition of money would have manifested itself for a time. A spontaneous impulse dictated by the feeling of affection undoubtedly infused the early Methodists, as it did primitive Christians, who put all their possessions at the disposal of the common need.

Nevertheless, at an early stage of Wesleyan development, the tendency to moral schism appeared at this point. The peculiarly efficient organization of the societies imposed a discipline of character which, with the sanctification of the economic motive, was certain to produce prosperous Methodists in the great period of unmonopolized expan-

sion. Then the temptation to dilute the moral imperative of the divine-ownership theory, which ordered the disposition of all money above the bare needs of the individual for the good of the community, became acute. Wesley and the early Methodists were felt to be too radical. Of course the revered leader of the revival was too well loved to be so labelled. Therefore a rising group of prosperous Methodists repudiated this part of the teaching by the apparently innocuous judgment that in this respect Wesley was simply impracticable.

That judgment is an index of a tendency that was accumulating force within the societies. Ultimately it was to achieve a reorientation of basic aspects in the outlook of the movement. The threat did not go unrecognized among those of the early generation. "Whilst the more of this world's goods many people have, the closer they hold them, and are less useful and less alive to God than when they are worth far less," wrote one whose anxiety had been aroused by the apparent drift. "What a pity that three or four thousand pounds should make men less useful and less happy, yet this is too often seen and known by sad experience, and will be a great hurt to the Methodist cause."[1] As early as 1780 Wesley was shocked by the mania for gaining money "even by pious parents,"[2] and in 1786 he ascribed the weakening of the work at Bristol to "love of money" and "love of ease." The malady had become sufficiently general and obvious by 1789 to arouse the very sharp condemnation of the Conference. With its frank diagnosis that "personal religion, either toward God or man, is amazingly superficial among us," the

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xiii., p. 464, 1790.

[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 84; *Journal*, vol. vii., pp. 209, 248.

Conference was not hesitant in locating one of the sources of that condition in the perversion of the doctrine of the disposition of money. The "love of the world," the "desire of pleasure, of ease" and "of getting money" had become so prevalent that Methodist character had been adulterated.[1]

The evidences for this opinion were numerous. One of the immediate consequences of the prosperity of Methodists was a drift away from the societies. The rate of deflection had always been very high, for Methodism made exacting demands upon its followers. It was estimated at one time that five out of six who made a beginning were lost to the permanent organization.[2] In the early phase, an exhaustion of interest on the part of new converts and numerous expulsions on moral grounds accounted for much of the deflection. The accumulation of riches later constituted a further ground of desertion. Because of this, said Wesley, "it is certain that many of the Methodists are already fallen, many are falling at this very time."[3] Many of these deserters signalized the quality of their motive by seeking a stamp of respectability in the Establishment. That, of course, was a tendency not peculiar to Methodists, for among the Dissenters in general it was observed, "the rich and fashionable . . . are apt to forsake the cause . . . merely because going to the Established Church is more fashionable."[4] The intimate relation between the chapel organization and the Church in certain localities sometimes eliminated the necessity for that

[1] *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr Wesley and Others. From the Year 1744 to the Year 1789*, p. 6. London, 1789.
[2] Joseph Cole, *Memoirs of Mrs Hannah Ball*, p. 134.
[3] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., p. 334.
[4] Joseph Cornish, *A Serious and Earnest Address to Protestant Dissenters of all Denominations*, etc., p. 64. London, 1772.

change. Prosperous members of the societies were able to be associated with both.

A second major effect of the altered economic status was manifested in the outlook within the societies rather than the drift away from the organization. It is here that the marked transformation in point of view became most apparent. By means of their enhanced prestige newly rich members frequently undertook to dominate the local organizations. It was less a calculated process than the contagion of an outlook which they had almost imperceptibly acquired. Their standing in the community permitted them to assume authority by the subtle force of prestige. Frequently they contributed with a liberality which would be certain to add to the weight of their voiced preferences. They built chapels for local societies, with the natural consequence that they often retained control of them. This was not without conflict between them and those of the older tradition who resisted encroachment.[1] But it was inevitable that where the wealthy patron "endeavoured to avert the loss of power which doubtless he meant to use well," and failed, he should refuse to attend or support the Methodist chapel any further.[2] It would be obtuse to assert that such domination was universal among the societies. There were many in agreement with the austere representative of the old school who said: "I sincerely pray God that we may never have new houses built by private rich members if he is [*sic*] to have" the right to control them.[3] In the middle of the next century it is still possible to find protests against ordering the affairs of the chapels "for

[1] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. viii., p. 122.
[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 182.
[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. viii., p. 21, "Journal of John Valton."

the special accommodation of the wealthier class of Wesleyan tradesmen and gentlemen."[1] Nevertheless, it was a leaven which later developments proved to be more potent than even denouncing contemporaries realized.

A more subtle method of diluting the obligation arising from the moral-ownership theory was the effect of greatly enlarged purchasing power upon the habits of personal austerity and stern frugality which had almost universally marked the earlier generation. Even when a notable generosity accompanied the success of Methodist enterprise, the tendency to break away from the early standards was irresistible. It brought about an alteration in habits and tastes which extended itself throughout the subsequent development of the movement. The dissolution of the rigorous demands of Methodist character among the prosperous was especially in evidence in the matter of their children. It was not alone that parents found it impossible to accept literally Wesley's injunction concerning the evil of inheritances. Their own new tastes and connections fostered desires which led them to seek advantages for their offspring which were inconsistent with the stern morality of the chapel. It was claimed that one of the results of the new affluence of Wesleyans was that they sent " their children to boarding schools where music, dancing and finery were introduced," and a taste cultivated for those things which were manifestly repugnant to the early Methodist.[2] The debilitating influences of this new class were even discovered in the conduct of Methodist schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, who introduced subjects into

[1] William B. Carter, *Methodism, Past and Present: Being a Documentary and Historical Investigation of Wesleyan Methodism in its Constitutional Principles and Connexional Policy* (3rd edition), p. v.

[2] Thomas Olivers, *An Answer to Mr Mark Davis's "Thoughts on Dancing,"* pp. 4-5. London, 1792.

the curriculum, in response to popular demand, contrary to Methodist tradition. Their action inspired vigorous rebukes by the Conference. The logical consummation of the whole tendency was most clearly demonstrated in the almost complete loss of the children of the new prosperous class, even when their parents maintained the form of loyalty to which they had been accustomed. "It is an appalling truth," said a writer early in the following century, "that very few of the children of rich Methodists ever become members of our Society." [1]

It remains that it was a shift in the temper of the official pronouncements of the societies and in the attitude of the leaders that most convincingly establishes the diverting effect of the changed economic standing of Methodists. At no other point does it appear so unmistakable that the native direction of the early societies was being deflected. Wesleyanism grew up in an atmosphere almost aggressively oblivious to class distinctions, when, indeed, it was not prejudiced in favour of the poorer groups. It gravitated slowly at first, and later with accelerated pace, towards a religion of respectability. It is true there were many other factors operating at the close of the century—notably the political situation—which contributed to that change. None of them was more potent than the influence of the new class, however, because its attitude and altered sense of values permeated the minds of many of the movement's spokesmen, and set a level above which their perceptions could not rise. There remained many of the plain and stern Methodists wedded to the older ideal, but they were powerless to settle the issue with a new outlook

[1] James McDonald, *An Address to the Preachers late in Connection with the Rev. J. Wesley on . . . Christian Education*, p. 15. Rochdale, 1821.

which was rapidly becoming the dominant force. Subtle changes of emphasis everywhere made their appearance which, taken together, measure strikingly how far the societies had moved from Wesley's leadership. The doctrine that one must not hoard what is not one's own and its corollary that one ought not to bequeath fortunes to one's children, since all belongs to God through the community, became transmuted into a bloodless injunction to give alms. That was itself a symbol of the change. "The poor are the Christians" was truly central to the early period, as the condemnation of riches and the diluted Methodism of the prosperous [1] was persistent. It was an Irish Methodist who wrote in 1805: "Many religious societies have been ruined through the accession of riches and power. I pray God always to keep the Methodists poor." [2] Nevertheless, in the societies the altered apologetic is not an injunction to equality or praise of the poor, but a defence of the rich. "Many individuals have been raised up to prove that" the doctrines of Methodism "may be entertained in the active success of business, in the midst of opulence, and even in elevated stations," [3] it was explained. It was with obvious pride that one of the prospering Methodists himself referred to the fact "that the increasing opulence and respectability of those who form the Methodist societies hold out a greater inducement to worldly minded men to associate with them, than was afforded in the origin of Methodism, is too evident to be denied," [4] and concluded by asking reproachfully

[1] *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers* (ed. by T. Jackson), vol. vi., p. 119.
[2] Andrew Hamilton, *A Compendious View of the Doctrines, Opinions, etc., of the Methodists*, p. 25.
[3] John Hill, *A Vindication of the Methodists in the Societies of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, p. 17. London, 1806.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

whether there could be anything censurable in this prestige and recognition which the very virtues of the Methodist had forced upon the societies.[1]

It was not alone that prosperous Methodists often sought to control the societies, including the right to determine who they should have as preachers—a form of censorship that undercut the most characteristic single feature of Wesleyan polity. It was that the growing regard for the prestige of the successful was becoming characteristic of the atmosphere within the societies. When the early chapels were built, care was exercised to make no distinction between accommodations for the rich and the poor. Before the close of the century a changing temper was in evidence. The methods adopted to support the work of the societies, to which reference is constantly made in eighteenth-century records, were collections, class dues, subscriptions, loans and special gifts. The typical attitude which recognized no distinctions of class within the chapels seems to have been, if anything, a deliberate considerateness for poorer attendants. It was an impulsive equality stimulated by an inward affection. The arrangements at the Foundery in London carried the authority of Wesley's considered policy. "All the benches were alike. No difference was made here between the rich and poor; no one was allowed to call any seat his own, the first-comers sat down first." [2] This plan, labelled by one historian, "Wesley's ideal of perfection," was also followed closely at West Street Chapel, London. Towards the close of Wesley's leadership, however, there appeared a tendency

[1] John Hill, *A Vindication of the Methodists in the Societies of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, p. 17. London 1806.

[2] John Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, p. 7 (London, 1887); G. T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel, London, and Its Associations*, p. 77 (London, 1872).

to discard the early practice. In 1787 Wesley reported with indignation that "the Committee proposed to me . . . that every one who took a pew should have it as his own. Thus overturning, at one blow, the discipline which I have been establishing for fifty years!"[1] But his authority was still final, and he reported in his *Journal* three days later, with a certain grimly unconscious humour, that the Committee had met him again and "after a calm and loving consultation, judged it best . . . that none should claim any pew as his own, either in the new chapel or in West Street." But the trend was too strong. Wesley's firm hand was soon withdrawn, and a few years after his death the practice of reserved pews and rentals had become an accepted local policy.[2] A description of an outstanding, prosperous community sketches a picture of the changed scene. "At this period five aldermen were seat-holders in Sunderland Street Chapel. The Methodists were no longer a very poor people. The pew-rents, from July 1802 to April 1803, inclusive, amounted to more than 148 pounds." In the new atmosphere it apparently seemed quite natural to set aside a special section of the chapel for favoured persons. "The gallery chiefly, if not exclusively, furnished the rents. It would seem that the body of the chapel was principally devoted to the service of those who were either unable or unwilling to pay for accommodation. . . . In the gallery there sat aldermen and others, who could and would contribute to the expenses incurred for their benefit."[3] Early Methodism was uncompromising and stern in offering its gospel to all on equal terms. At this same chapel, in the later period,

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 349.
[2] John Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, p. 78.
[3] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 232.

arrangements were made for persons to attend the services without the embarrassment of detection. Certain seats were so placed that "those who occupied them could be seen by very few of those who might be in other parts of the chapel."[1] It would be obtuse to discover in these facts a refinement necessarily incongruous with the early spirit. It was natural and not necessarily inconsistent with sound doctrine for Methodist families to seek a regular seating in the chapel. But when every allowance has been made, it remains that the development was another item in the changing mentality of Methodists who were moving towards a religion of respectability—a direction that led away from the creative spirit of the days of its pioneering.

Even where the early Puritanic austerity persisted, it tended to assume a certain self-conscious pride in simplicity that reflected the new sense of economic prestige. "I do not deny that there may lawfully be some distinction in the quality of our clothes, according to the station in which we are placed,"[2] declared one who had inherited the stern tradition with a defect in his perception of its spirit. It was a radical departure from the severely equalitarian emphasis of Wesley's age that induced a prevalent practice of paying "more attention to the rich than to the poor," and slackening "the reins of discipline on their account." "There are many," said Adam Clarke, "who continually forget that a man is before God simply what he is in his soul, and not what he is in his purse or possessions. Some carry this inattention so far that the smallest dawning of spiritual good in a rich or honourable

[1] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 251.

[2] John Riles, *Strictures on Female Attire, in Two Epistles*, p. 9. Penryn, 1814.

man is magnified into a constellation of excellences." [1] It cannot be emphasized too strongly that much of the austere, disciplined and benevolent ideal of Wesleyanism continued to distinguish Methodists. Nevertheless, it is clear that the ethical-economic teaching of Wesley, with its ideas about the use of money, ceased to be a practical conception. With that rejection, a new spirit tended to control the movement, and the moral emphasis in the revival's economic teaching was neutralized. Many of the Puritan virtues remained, but as a progressive factor in the definitely political and economic struggles of the succeeding century, Wesleyanism had surrendered its capacity for creative leadership.

[1] *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. iii., "Memorial to John Pawson," pp. 102-103.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WESLEYAN PHILANTHROPY

THE philanthropy issuing from the Wesleyan movement was one test of its social theory. Its extent revealed the strength of the movement in moulding social attitudes. Its motives trace the same development in mood and outlook displayed in other phases of the revival. At the same time it demonstrated the weakness of the Wesleyan view as a complete social theory adequate to cope with the problems of the great society.

1. *Its Doctrine of Social Responsibility*

In attempting to define the nature and extent of the movement's service to social need its leaders were not content to appeal merely to human sympathy and Christian compassion. They undertook to justify their policy by drawing from their theory of ownership, from their view of human nature, and from the doctrine of social rights which were alleged to be inherent in the structure of the community. All of these contributed to a philanthropic theory.

There was none of that fatalism in Wesleyanism which almost uniformly characterized the prevailing outlook towards social distress of an economic origin. Where contemporaries were discovering that poverty and its attendant problems were the inescapable result of the nature of things, the societies were led to think of it as

a specific misuse of the community's resources. In this view poverty was largely the direct consequence of an unsocialized use of property. The sole title to any possessions which a man might justly claim was defined as a measure of control for a definitely moral purpose—to satisfy the needs of the community. Men had perverted their control and social distress was the result.

The starting-point of this thought was, of course, the Wesleyan doctrine of the nature of property. No human authority was competent to alienate the divine title, not only to the material wealth of society, but also to men's abilities and bodies.[1] Men are only "entrusted . . . for a season with goods of various kinds, but the sole property of these still rests in" God.[2] The Christian was instructed that he was entitled to supply his "own reasonable wants, together with those of (his) family," but beyond this he had no further defensible claim to use property for his own desires. The remainder must be delivered to God, "through the poor . . . whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of (God's) substance which (He) had placed in thy hands for this purpose."[3] This in itself was sufficient ground for the condemnation of the consumption of all luxuries in the community. "No Christian can afford to waste any part of the substance which God has entrusted him with,"[4] for a specific purpose. In addition, however, it was regarded as an evidence of the providential arrangement of affairs that human nature could not withstand the evil that issues from a misuse of something which does not belong to man. "If, therefore,

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vi., pp. 136-149.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 22.

you do not spend your money in doing good to others," declared Wesley, "you must spend it to the hurt of yourself."[1] It was, of course, this moral purpose dictating the use of all of the material resources of society for the satisfaction of the needs of the entire community which validated the wealth-making processes in society. After having achieved the economic basis of independence, defined as providing the plain necessities of life, then the sole justification for the continued and unlimited pursuit of economic goods was that one might be enabled to supply the needs of others, "to feed the hungry, and cover the naked with a garment," and to put the poor "in a way of supplying their own wants for the time to come."[2] The economic and the philanthropic theory of the revival were a unit.

It is in the degree that this point of view was made explicit which gives it distinction. The duty of giving something for the needs of the poor, as a pious act, was not the teaching of the men who set the standard. It was the radical and clean-cut demand that one should give everything and possess nothing that makes the Wesleyan philanthropic outlook noteworthy. It was not alone that, as a matter of observation, the possession of property destroyed the ideal type of character the revival sought to create.[3] It was the reasoned acceptance of the theory that the moral use of property forbids great economic inequalities that is unique. "The apostle does not fix the charge," it was pointed out, "barely on possessing any quantity of goods, but on possessing more than we employ according to the will of the Donor."[4] It is no admissible justification for accumulating riches to argue that one must provide for

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. v., p. 374.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 286.
[3] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 519.
[4] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 9.

the future of one's family, for inheritance is as reprehensible as any other mode of becoming rich.[1] The simplest of rules govern the whole matter. After providing for necessities one must give not a tenth, a half; "no, nor three-fourths, but all!"[2] Failure to adhere to this was held to be a threefold offence—against God, against the community, and against one's own self. Those who fail to do it, said Wesley, "are not only robbing God, continually embezzling and wasting their Lord's goods, and by that very means corrupting their own souls, but also robbing the poor, the hungry, the naked; wronging the widow and the fatherless; and making themselves accountable for all the want, affliction, and distress which they may but do not remove."[3]

This radical doctrine of philanthropy displays the tendencies of a form of communism which, as has been pointed out, subsequent Methodists were vigorous in denying. There can be little doubt, however, that although the founder of Methodism would have found repellent the political implications of communism, nevertheless he seriously defended the ideal of the primitive Christian community.[4] That, of course, was impulsive and spontaneous rather than an intellectual idea. One of the earliest official documents of the movement actually voiced the communistic aspiration. It was directed in the bands and the select societies in 1744 "that, till they could have all things in common, every member should bring once a week all he could spare toward a common stock."[5] The affirmation that a man might use money

[1] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., pp. 637-641.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 10.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 375.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., pp. 286-287.
[5] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. i., p. 445.

for himself only to the extent of necessities, and that all the remainder must be devoted to social need, was the practical form which the theory assumed. Wesley himself did not deviate from the principle throughout his life. In 1743 he wrote: "If I leave behind me ten pounds . . . you and all mankind bear witness against me that I lived and died a thief and a robber." [1] Forty-seven years later, on the eve of his death, he wrote as a postscript to that determination: "For upwards of eighty-six years I have kept my accounts exactly. I will not attempt it any longer, being satisfied with the continual conviction that I save all I can, and give all I can—that is, all I have." [2]

2. *The Dynamic of a Philanthropic Disposition*

No articulated philanthropic theory, however, could account for the record of the revival in its service to the temporal needs of society. This reasoned theory of philanthropic principles really became plausible in its application only in the perspective of a felt experience of social affection and loyalty. For this it is necessary to turn to the main theme of the revival—the temper produced by an intense religious experience. It is that experience, it was pointed out, that is "productive of all right actions," for "it leads one into an earnest and steady discharge of all social offices, of whatever is due to relations of every kind, to his friends, to his country, to any particular community, whereof he is a member." [3] The core of the religious ethic which the leaders of the revival undertook to propagate was a socialization of will. "The Gospel of Christ knows of no Religion but Social; no

[1] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. i., p. 436.
[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. viii., p. 80.
[3] *Idem*, *Works*, vol. ix., p. 196.

Holiness but Social Holiness "[1] was its characteristic note, and the doctrine of a socialized will so stated was best illustrated in the philanthropic temper sought, because it was in this realm of service to social need that the narrowed limitations of the doctrine were made apparent.

From the very inception of the societies the existence of social distress was held to impose a special obligation upon Methodists. The discipline of the societies raised it into a rule of life. The authoritative rules of 1743 rated the duty to serve men's bodily as well as spiritual needs as a prime qualification for membership. The opinion that it was anything less than mandatory aroused a heated controversy and was vigorously labelled "that enthusiastic doctrine of devils."[2] "Nor do we acknowledge him to have one grain of faith, who is not continually doing good, who is not willing 'to spend and be spent in doing all good, as he has opportunity, to all men,'"[3] said Wesley, in a published letter to a current publication.

Nevertheless the disciplinary insistence upon continual attention to the relief of social need was but a practical device to express in the form of a rule what was, in fact, an impulsive action. Its source was a social affection, "an invariable and tender good-will to mankind."[4] "Good works" themselves were quite meritless. It was the habitual disposition that was basic. "Without this, all . . . is of no value," it was affirmed. That disposition was the creation of the religious experience. Wesley explained the view in an open letter to Methodists: "You . . . believe this love of human kind cannot spring but from the love of God. You think there can be no instance

[1] John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (5th edition), p. v.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 271.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 513.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 426.

of one whose tender affection embraces every child of man (though not endeared to him either by ties of blood, or by any natural or civil relation), unless that affection flow from a grateful, filial love to the common Father of all." [1] The necessary fruit of this temper is manifested in the "hungering and thirsting to do good, in every possible kind." [2]

A disposition was therefore the main factor in positive Wesleyan philanthropy. This conception of a will socialized and a disposition made sensitive to social need was the content given to the prescription that love is "the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world." [3] It was this disposition that prompted the spirit in which service to social need should be rendered. The whole point of view involved a rejection of the note of condescension so common to contemporary charity. "Give none that asks relief either an ill word or an ill look. Do not hurt them," [4] was the expression of a ruling temper. The whole matter was characteristically personal. Any intention to secure credit for such service was held to be a violation of the spirit and outlook of the revival, and hence it was held to be important to "do it in as secret a manner as is possible." [5]

It was in the nature of this philanthropic impulse that it could not be restricted to any section of the community. Wesley declared that he broke with the Moravians because they were "by no means zealous of good works, or, at least, only to their own people." [6] The doctrine of predestination likewise was attacked for the reason that it dried up the disposition to serve men and tended to weaken

[1] John Wesley, vol. viii., p. 352.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 220.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 3.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 330.
[6] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. i., p. 337.

one's devotion to philanthropic activity.[1] Wesleyans were enjoined to constant vigilance in their attention to distress within the societies,[2] but they were also warned that they must not allow their "love or beneficence [to] be confined to Methodists."[3]

3. *The Philanthropic Record of the Wesleyan Community*

(*a*) The effect of these radical ideas—which really lay outside any almsgiving tradition—and the emotional disposition produced by the revival is to be read in the movement's record in the relief of distress. The characteristic social temper which Wesley justly claimed to be the chief outward mark of the Methodist was an intensely personal impulse. Conceivably it might have been canalized into group enterprise. In fact it was not in any unique way. It worked through familiar forms. Personal and not organized action distinguishes the philanthropy of the revival.

Its chief claim to uniqueness is the extraordinary degree that the typical member of the societies manifested an aggressive interest in the distress about him. This being true, it follows that no statistical record of the revival's accomplishments is discoverable. The great mass of biographical material extant provides by far the best cross-section, however, to reveal both the extent and quality of the activity.

Sensitized perception of economic distress and a ready disposition to furnish relief was by no means the rôle monopolized by the more affluent members of the Wesleyan

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. vii., p. 378.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 271.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. xi., p. 431.

groups. If anything, the poorer members yielded to the impulse more fully. The atmosphere of the societies was one of mutual helpfulness and spontaneous friendliness rather than a calculating apportionment of alms. It was an open boast that few recipients of relief from local authorities would be found to be Methodists, not only because of an enhanced self-respect and a greater ability to ward off extreme poverty, but because of the mutual assistance constantly rendered between members of the societies. They "indignantly spurned . . . parish pay."[1] On the other hand, wrote one who had occasion to observe their response to appeals for contribution, "I was astonished at the amazing liberality of this poor people," which was so great that he "was even obliged to stay the hand of some," lest they suffer for their generosity.[2] The sheer felt imperative to give was so strong that self-denial was no burden. One's usual employment might produce barely enough for subsistence needs, but the impulse was so strong that it would drive one to work extra hours, in order to "have to give to others for necessary uses."[3] It served as one of the bases of an attack on early Methodism that its poor members gave with an apparent recklessness which seemed outrageous in the face of their own apparent needs. The only answer which could be made was that, in spite of the fact, the givers were obviously better situated than before they became members of the societies. To "give liberally to the necessities of others" constituted one of the normal expressions of that Methodist character which, being rehabilitated with self-respect and imbued with the industrial virtues, inevitably bore fruit

[1] Richard Chew, *James Everett*, p. 9.

[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. viii., p. 34.

[3] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. iv., p. 153, "An Account of Mrs Jane Muncy," 1781.

in economic independence.[1] This identical spirit was displayed throughout all the groups which made up the societies, at least until the growth of prosperity and the influences of new factors began to dilute the Wesleyan attitude. Indeed, there is an abundance of testimony that the advent of affluence was frequently accompanied by a corresponding increase in acknowledged responsibility to social need.[2] Members of the societies vied with each other in the presence of unusual suffering "saying 'nothing that we have will we call our own in this season of distress.'"[3] Everywhere Methodists gained community-wide reputations for their benefactions.[4] If the poorer group did more nearly approximate Wesley's rule to give away all above what was required for necessities, the others often gave large proportions of their total income methodically, even as much as a half.[5] The daughter of an early Methodist builder testified that she had witnessed her "father lay out his last guinea to relieve suffering, employing men in winter beyond his ability."[6] The disposition was strong enough to impel Methodists to give "what was really wanted at home."[7]

Members of the societies who suffered from want naturally occupied a peculiarly central place in the benefactions, but the field of philanthropic interest was by no means limited to them. It was extended to all who came within

[1] John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley*, vol. iii., pp. 116-119.

[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, pp. 252-253.

[3] "G. H. H.," *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in Notts*, p. 74.

[4] J. Janion, sen., *Methodism in Chester*, pp. 72-73; W. Pilkington, *Methodism in Preston*, p. 21.

[5] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. i., p. 275, 1778; Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 175; John Taylor, *Fylde Methodism*, p. 26.

[6] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. vii., p. 32.

[7] James Everett, *Methodism in Sheffield*, vol. ii., p. 18.

the vision of social need[1] whether local or at a distance.[2] The vitality of that philanthropic impulse is best measured by the aggressiveness with which Methodists sought out need in order to ameliorate it. They were unwilling to wait for it to be forced upon their attention.[3] It was equally characteristic of this great body of benevolence that it was administered by personal contacts and in the most secretive ways. It is because so much of the revival's benevolence was intentionally "unostentatious"[4] and because Methodists did seek "the most secret methods of distributing" their material assistance, that it is impossible to venture any detailed estimate of its extent.[5]

Many of the early Wesleyans made social relief work so central that it consumed a large share of their time and became an avocation. When not confined at their regular occupations they concentrated on their "beloved work of doing good to the bodies and souls of (their) fellow-creatures."[6] They made it their "business to seek out the poor and needy . . . those who would not, and to others who could not," come to them.[7] Sometimes, when they had accumulated a sufficient sum to meet their own needs, they retired from active business in order to devote themselves exclusively to "the promotion of religious and philanthropic objects,"[8] and the "interests of public

[1] Alexander Strachan, *The Life and Times of the Rev. George Lowe*, p. 165.
[2] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, pp. xv-xvi.
[3] *The Life of Mr Henry Longden*, p. 206.
[4] Robert Newton, *Memoirs of the Late Mr Francis Newton of Thorpe, near Whitby*, p. 19.
[5] *The Life of Mr Henry Longden*, p. 206.
[6] J. Miles, *A Memoir of the Late Mr E. Griffith*, p. 44.
[7] John Pritchard, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Captain Webb, and Preached at Portland Chapel, Bristol*, pp. 21-22.
[8] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, pp. 51-53.

charities."[1] It is a commentary upon the standing which many of these Methodist philanthropists achieved in the community that they were asked by others, outside the societies as well as within, to act as agents in the disbursements of funds for the relief of social need. "His extensive liberality was not supported wholly from his own purse," remarks a biographer characteristically, for "many who knew his integrity and manner of life in visiting the abodes of wretchedness made him their almoner."[2]

(*b*) Beside this mass of unorganized relief the more tangible organized service of the movement shrinks into relative unimportance. The latter is, however, a matter of more detailed record, while the former is not. Historians have been compelled to turn to the record in forming their judgments. But the main significance of Wesleyan organization for the relief of need is that it merely confirms the dominance of the philanthropic disposition to which the individual testimonies bear witness. The organized philanthropy adds nothing unique to the history of the subject. It initiated no novel solutions to the problem of poverty. It produced no permanently effectual agencies for the prevention of economic destitution. It even failed to recognize the potential forces contained in its own powerful and disciplined body for philanthropic service. Its organized activities were really large and important, but they were little more than instances of the prevalent impulsive, individual relief, conducted on a larger scale. The movement advanced its special solution to the problem when it undertook to work through the creation of a certain type of character. Germinally, it also contained an

[1] James Everett, *Methodism in Sheffield*, pp. 170-171.

[2] Thomas Wood, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late Mr James Bundy*, p. 51; George Cussons, *Memoirs*; and *The Life of Mr Henry Longden*, pp. 55-56.

institutionalized solution of those evils which issue from economic need, in the theory that men must devote all of their material earnings to the needs of society. But so complete was the revival's reliance upon the individual's philanthropic initiative that this seed was left unfertilized.

It is therefore as a further gauge of the movement's social disposition that its organized relief activities are to be viewed. Every part of its remarkably well-adapted organization — lay-preaching, itinerancy, the circuit, the societies, bands and class-meetings — was enlisted to serve material as well as spiritual need. Except for the earliest years before the movement had fully established itself independent of outside influence, like that of the Moravians, the emphasis upon this function of the societies was invariable. While the first set of rules of the Fetter Lane Society in 1738 and the rules of the "Band Societies" of 1738 omitted references to the duty, the authoritative document of 1743, which has been aptly called the "Manifesto" of Methodism, made the position unmistakably plain. It was kept in the forefront throughout Wesley's lifetime. As early as 1741 every member was asked to give methodically at least a penny weekly, while in 1742 the fundamental unit, the class, was built around a systematic collection of weekly funds for the relief of the poor, to which it was devoted for more than forty years. The practice became standard, although no record exists of the obviously large amounts collected. Every evidence indicates that the general practice was in the "same proportion" as one of the societies "which collected annually, for the relief of the poor, from six to seven hundred pounds."[1]

[1] John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, pp. 117-118.

In addition to the regular use of the societies' organizations for destitution relief, Methodism's constant preoccupation with the matter revealed itself in the multitude of associative ways suited to the occasion. Most of them issued directly from the selective and administrative genius of John Wesley. The leaders preached innumerable charity-sermon benefits either for needy individuals or general causes. Regularly in the presence of unusual distress, large special collections were made in the societies and by subscription, to supply the pressing wants of the destitute. The claim was made that in projects of public philanthropy, such as infirmaries, the collections in the Methodist chapels "often exceeded those made in other places of worship, and even in the churches."[1] The collection and distribution of both clothing and food were organized under the direction of local societies. As early as 1748 an attempt was made to render their service more effective and reduce the burden of out-relief by instituting a poorhouse at the London Foundery — an experiment that was discontinued after "an unknown interval"[2] for lack of support. It was more dependable to rely upon a ready response to recognized need made urgent by an emergency than to support an institution continuously. A similar experiment at Newcastle has left practically no record of its extent or effectiveness.

Two experiments in the relief of economic distress were more noteworthy. Both of them aimed at poverty prevention, but the most important one was beyond the movement's competence to handle permanently. This was a scheme sponsored by Wesley in London to provide

[1] Joseph Benson, *A Vindication of the People Called Methodists*. London, 1800.

[2] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, p. 85.

employment. It was not novel since it was a method of common resort. But it indicates the undistorted impulse of the societies, ready to seize any available instrument useful to their avowed purpose. A small group of the poorest persons was set to work carding and spinning cotton, in 1740. The experiment was kept up about four months. On another occasion, knitting was provided for women under the supervision of the society's visitors of the sick. An experiment of longer duration and greater success was the provision, in 1746, of a loan fund, from which deserving persons could borrow amounts up to twenty shillings. The scheme worked well and was later enlarged, while the borrowing limit was set in 1772 at five pounds. These sporadic instances of constructive philanthropy were, of course, never extended through the societies, where they might have become major factors in providing a large solution to an ever-pressing problem. But they indicate a significant mood. One of the later forms of organized relief found a wider representation. Societies were formed "wholly for the relief, not of our own society, but for poor, sick, and friendless strangers." The idea behind the "Strangers' Society" spread rapidly among the Methodists,[1] and by 1800 most of the large centres of population supported a similar enterprise.[2]

(*c*) The relief of the sick was intimately related to the promotion of hygienic habits in the work of the revival, although the one was more properly part of its philanthropic programme while the other was one of its educative functions. As a popular movement, the prevalence of disease and its attendant distress among the poor brought

[1] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, p. 49.

[2] Joseph Benson, *A Vindication of the People Called Methodists* (1800 edition), p. 24.

out an emphasis upon sick relief that ranked it beside the spiritual ministration which the societies sought to provide. The two aims were prosecuted jointly. The mood which the revival produced found here its readiest outlet. "All my leisure hours," declared a Methodist whose experience was characteristic, "I spent in going up and down to the sick and poor, comforting, praying with and relieving them."[1]

The organized forms of sick relief in the societies appeared early and, unlike certain of the efforts to relieve economic need, persisted over a long period. As early as 1741 a group of volunteers in London worked under Wesley in regular sick visitation. The service expanded and was later reorganized on a larger scale. "I chose six-and-forty of them, whom I judged to be of the most tender, loving spirit; divided the town into twenty-three parts, and desired two of them to visit the sick in each division," wrote Wesley.[2] The regular organizations of the societies later came to function as agencies for the administration of such relief. The Minutes of 1748 directed class leaders to report to the preachers weekly "by note of every sick person," and also to notify the regular visitor.[3] This was no sporadic service. Individual members, preachers, leaders and appointed visitors combined to make it effective. It extended not only to Methodists but others outside the societies, constituting, in fact, one of the methods of recruiting new members.[4] Special rules were issued by the Conference for visitors to the sick.[5] The service rendered was severely practical.

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xxi., p. 54, 1798.
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 263; *Journal*, vol. ii., p. 457.
[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. i., p. 58.
[4] James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester*, vol. i., p. 64.
[5] *Minutes of Several Conversations*, etc., p. 17. 1744.

Visitors were instructed to begin by inquiring into the outward economic condition of the sick and to supply their physical needs. This was coupled with the educational programme of the movement in promoting personal hygiene. "Everywhere recommend Decency and Cleanliness," directed the Minutes of the Conference, for "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."[1] The people must be taught the twin virtues of "industry and cleanliness," said Wesley, for the want of cleanliness "is a scandal to all religion."[2]

Wesley in particular recognized the inadequacy of contemporary provisions for public health, especially in respect to hospital facilities, and he tried to offer such substitutes through the societies' service as were found practicable. This even took the form of organizing a free dispensary in London in 1746 which treated large numbers of the sick poor, but it was "found impossible to carry the work further because of the burden of expense,"[3] and it was consequently discontinued in 1754. It was hardly a representative organization, although as late as 1780 there is record of a physician for poor Methodists in attendance at another London society, and the physicians that early Methodism enrolled among its members rendered large service in supplying service to the poor that would not otherwise have been available.[4] Organized sick relief outside of the exclusive jurisdiction of the societies, but supported by Methodists, appeared first in 1785. Similar projects were probably in operation among other groups, but the "most extensive work of the sort seems to have been promoted by Methodists."[5] In its first seventeen

[1] *Minutes of Several Conversations*, etc., p. 29. 1789.
[2] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, pp. 38-39.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[4] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iii., p. 16.
[5] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, p. 47.

years the London society disbursed more than two thousand pounds. Efforts were made to stimulate the formation of similar associative relief in other communities by broadcasting copies of the rules of the new organization.

Of much greater importance was the really extensive educational programme which was part of the ordinary work of the revival. Not only was hygiene taught to the poor by the visitors of the sick; the class meetings and preaching also were persistent media for fostering healthful habits of life. The preachers were enjoined to spread health literature throughout the societies. In 1745 a twopenny tract describing simple remedies for treating sickness, called *A Collation of Receits for the Use of the Poor*, was published. In 1747 Wesley published *Primitive Physick, or An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases.* "There was a swift and large demand for it,"[1] and it ran through twenty-three editions in Wesley's lifetime and thirty-two editions by 1828. Apart from the remedies that the volume prescribes, it contained a series of rules for hygienic living which were remarkably far-sighted and sound. In 1769 Wesley published *Advices with Respect to Health*, extracted from a work of Dr Tissot, and in 1774, *An Extract from Cadogan's Dissertation on the Gout and All Chronic Diseases.* He wrote a further article, called "Thoughts on Nervous Disorders," in the *Arminian Magazine*, in 1786. As early as 1744 a series of books on "physick" was kept for the use of the preachers at London, Bristol and Newcastle, since in their widely varying service one of the duties of the preachers was to minister to the sick.[2] If one were to estimate the value of the philanthropic activities of the revival in the sphere of sick

[1] Introduction to 1785 edition, p. xvii.
[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. i., pp. 1, 16, 28, 49.

relief, its educative service would clearly outdistance all other contributions in permanent value. To it and the moral character which the revival produced was due the remarkable alteration that manifested itself in the living conditions of the poor whom the Methodist movement touched. "Early Methodist preachers found many of the people in a semi-barbarous state, deeply sunk in ignorance and vice, and almost lost in dirt and wretchedness. And it is no less certain, that wherever religion took deep root, cleanliness and order, with personal and domestic comfort, followed in the trail of vital godliness."[1]

(*d*) The contribution of Wesleyanism to that development which culminated in the adoption of popular education as a public policy is clear even though during Wesley's lifetime it was largely indirect. The roots of the revival's interest in education went back to the Oxford Methodists and, indeed, were grounded in that notable emphasis upon the value of early instruction which was an eighteenth-century axiom. Yet it is apparent that there occurred a break of basic significance between the prevailing tradition and the educational programme sponsored by Methodist agencies. That break comes chiefly in the purposes and mood of the latter rather than in the discovery of new forms or extent. The Wesleyan programme revolved about three distinct sorts of agencies: schools for elementary instruction, the dissemination of popular literature, and the Sunday-school movement. Part of that programme most nearly approached an enlightened and curative philanthropy. The motives which prompted it and the forms it took were independent of the mood of charity.

(1) The provision of facilities for elementary instruction

[1] William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 28; Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism*, etc., p. 36.

was one of the earliest and continued to be one of the most emphasized aspects of the programme. No centrally organized enterprise of education was attempted. Yet the movement did generate a persistent enthusiasm for popular instruction. Its actual organization was left to local initiative. This accounts for the fact that the record of its extent is particularly fragmentary, although the evidence of its nature is adequate. Each of the currently familiar forms was adopted and developed. The familiar charity school for children whose parents were too poor to provide any other sort of education was copied in many localities. The higher grade school at which a fee was charged became increasingly a common feature of the movement. Frequently the two types were combined.

The earliest Methodist group at Oxford had rated highly their service in providing instruction for poor children. Wesley himself paid for the services of a teacher.[1] He carried the same enthusiasm to Georgia. It was but natural that one of the first undertakings of the independent forces of the revival should be the provision of school facilities. As early as 1739, Whitefield had initiated the idea of a school among the poor colliers at Kingswood, a project that Wesley carried through. At this period it was mainly a charity school, the nature of which Wesley indicates in his *Journal*: "It is proposed, in the usual hours of the day, to teach chiefly the poorer children to read, write, and cast accounts; but more especially (by God's assistance) to 'know God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent.' The older people, being not so proper to be mixed with children (for we expect scholars of all ages, some of them grey-headed), will be taught in the inner rooms, either early in the morning, or late at night, so

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. i., p. 467.

that they may work unhindered." [1] The school prospered and was enlarged as a fee-paying institution nine years later. Part of the noteworthiness of Kingswood lay in the fact that it was an enterprise sponsored by the movement as a whole and was not, as generally, dependent upon local initiative. Of much greater extent were the numerous charity schools scattered throughout the societies, provided by individual members or local organizations. A Bristol society began a charity school as early as 1739, which became an ambitious undertaking and had to be curtailed on account of expense. Instruction was provided at the Foundery in London for pupils who paid fees and a larger number who received free instruction. West Street Chapel, London, had at one time as many as one hundred and forty pupils.[2] It was one of the purposes of the Newcastle Orphan House "to give instruction to the destitute poor," although the school seems never to have been established.[3] The first preaching-house erected in Halifax was also used "as a day-school, for the purpose of instructing children" under a poor collier who was also a local preacher.[4] "A school-chapel, the first Wesleyan school in the Bradford district, was erected in 1766." [5] One of the outstanding leaders of the movement felt "with the deepest sensibility the disconsolate condition of poor uninstructed children," and "began a school, wherein he taught them himself every day. After pursuing this method for some time, he erected a school." [6] The work of individual Methodists was at least as extensive.

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. ii., p. 323.
[2] J. Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, p. 72.
[3] W. W. Stamp, *The Orphan House of Wesley*, p. 22.
[4] James Everett, *Methodism in Manchester*, p. 118.
[5] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iii., p. 102.
[6] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 334.

Wesley welcomed every occasion to encourage such ventures.[1] Frequently individuals assumed complete responsibility themselves, both for the necessary facilities and for the instruction itself.[2] These were chiefly day schools, but at least one notable instance is on record in which orphan children were fully maintained and taught over a period of eighteen years.[3] In some cases where individuals were not able to provide the facilities and teach themselves, they paid for the service performed by another.[4] Society members who were regularly employed in other pursuits often gave their free time to teaching.[5] "Respecting the education of their children," declared a member of the Establishment, "it is notorious that not any body of Christians has made greater exertion towards the attainment of so valuable an end than the Methodists: witness their noble seminary at Kingswood, their numerous Charity Schools, in London and elsewhere; exclusive of frequent instruction which they receive from the Preachers, who meet them in a body by themselves once a week, for the purpose of catechising, etc." [6]

In the fifty years succeeding the birth of the revival fee-charging schools developed with the extension of the movement and the changing status of many of its members. As early as 1748 Kingswood was transformed into a partly fee-supported school, designed chiefly for preachers' children. The course was classical, and Wesley esteemed its effectiveness at least as highly as any to be secured

[1] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 471.
[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 344.
[3] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, p. 99.
[4] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 218.
[5] *Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. vi., 4th edition (ed. Joseph Sutcliffe), "Life of Mr John Valton," p. 92.
[6] *Methodism Vindicated: A Reply to Clapham*, by "A Member of the Church of England," p. 55.

elsewhere. Collections from the societies assisted in its maintenance, and provision was made for the attendance of preachers' daughters at other schools by the same method. The many schools conducted by Methodists were spread throughout the country, entirely outside the jurisdiction of the societies except through the discipline which local organizations imposed upon their members. Frequently the masters were local preachers [1] or retired preachers.[2] Many of these institutions gained a high reputation in the community and attracted to them pupils other than from Methodist families, "among the higher and middling classes of people." [3] The development of these schools frequently reflected the altering status of many Methodists. They tended to provide the sort of instruction desired by a prospering group, seeking an education for their children superior to their own and commensurate with their new standing. The extension of the curriculum to include dancing and similar subjects provoked a drastic condemnation by the Conference in 1785, though the practice continued, in spite of disciplinary action. It was difficult to reach the Methodists "who abounded in wealth, and were, sometimes, less eminent in religion," [4] and, in any event, it was claimed that these schools "have not a third, perhaps not a fourth part of their scholars from among the people called Methodists" [5] —a fact which a representative of the Wesleyan Connexion admitted and deplored.[6]

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 129, note.
[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., p. 147.
[3] James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield*, etc., p. 87.
[4] Thomas Olivers, *An Answer to Mr Mark Davis's "Thoughts on Dancing."*
[5] M. Davis, *Thoughts on Dancing*, p. 26.
[6] Thomas Olivers, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

(2) The most completely organized form of educative activity which the movement undertook was the wide dissemination of literature as a project of popular instruction. The early years of the century had already witnessed a striking extension in the publication of inexpensive pamphlets which in some cases achieved an enormous circulation. Wesleyanism adopted the medium as an organized method. Wesley himself was its driving force and the campaign was conducted through a central office, called the Book Room. The programme which was defined in this matter was an ambitious one: it included the deliberate cultivation of a taste for reading and the organization of an effective series of channels to convey the literature throughout the land. It began with the preachers who were warned that one could "never be a deep Preacher without" extensive reading, "any more than a thorough Christian."[1] Wesley himself conducted classes in systematic reading with them,[2] and enjoined his preachers to spend "at least five hours in twenty-four in reading the most useful books."[3]

The problem of providing suitable literature for popular consumption was solved by undertaking an extensive programme of publication. Wesley was indefatigable, not only in writing but also in selecting and editing chosen extracts from a host of other writers. The chief interest was naturally religious and moral, but the range of the literature which poured from the Wesleyan publication offices was, considering the period, nothing short of extraordinary. It included biography, poetry, travel, subjects of daily utility, etiquette, school books, Christian casuistry,

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 254.
[2] T. E. Brigden, *Wesley Studies*, pp. 142-150.
[3] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 581.

the writings of Locke, Spencer, Shakespeare and Malebranche, as well as explicitly religious works.[1] In addition, from 1778, a magazine was regularly published by the Connexion. Its pages, too, were devoted to biography, literature, practical advice and poetry, as well as religion. Its breadth of taste under Wesley's editorship was so wide that it even incurred criticism from stricter Methodists for including matter held to be too secular in nature.[2]

The entire Wesleyan organization was then used to spread this literature throughout the membership of the societies. An early Conference marked the place that this duty must be accorded in the business of the movement. "The societies are not half supplied with books; not even with *Kempis*, *Instructions for Children*, and *Primitive Physic*, which ought to be in every house." To achieve this end, every preacher, and indeed every society member, became a book agent. The preachers were constantly prodded into renewed effort. "Exert yourselves in this," they were reminded. "Be not ashamed. Be not weary. Leave no stone unturned,"[3] while the Conference Minutes urged them to "be more active in dispersing Books."[4] Many of the smaller publications were given away. The preachers were instructed to "beg money of the rich to buy books for the poor." Subscriptions were promoted for the purpose of establishing local collections for general use,[5] the value of which to those who would not otherwise have

[1] *A Catalogue of Books published by the Late Rev. John Wesley*, etc., by Mr T. Blanshard; John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., pp. 261-262.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xii., p. iv., 1789.

[3] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. ii., p. 477.

[4] *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr Wesley and Others. From the Year 1744 to the Year 1789*, p. 39.

[5] George Jackson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Darlington Circuit*, p. 10.

had access to such material was strongly attested.[1] The success of the whole project was unparalleled in any other movement. The taste created was so evident that a London bookseller reported that "there are thousands in this society who will never read anything besides the Bible, and the books published by Mr Wesley." [2] One could "scarcely enter the habitation of the humblest among them without finding a Bible, a hymn-book, the *Methodist Magazine* and other tracts," the very appearance of which proved that they did "not lie neglected on the shelf." [3] The income from the business was sufficient to make Wesley a wealthy man, were it not for the fact that all the profits were devoted to the relief of preachers and to the extension of the revival's work.[4] All of this enterprise was under the direct supervision of the societies. Independent members extended the impulse through the organization of other ventures, notably the society instituted in 1782, to distribute religious tracts among the poor,[5] and the Naval and Military Bible Society, for the distribution of Bibles.[6] "He consistently sought to educate his own people," with the result that "no man in the eighteenth century did so much to create a taste for good reading, and to supply it with books at the lowest prices," [7] as John Wesley. This is a fair appraisal of the achievement of the early revival.

[1] William Entwistle, *Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwistle*, p. 10.

[2] James Lackington, *Memoirs of the . . . Life of James Lackington*, p. 77.

[3] John Hill, *A Vindication of the Methodists*, etc., p. 26.

[4] T. Alexander Seed, *Norfolk Street Wesleyan Chapel, Sheffield*, p. 180.

[5] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 369; T. Preston, *The Death of the Righteous*, etc., pp. 25-26.

[6] Luke Tyerman, *ibid.*, vol. iii., pp. 314-315.

[7] "John Telford," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. xxviii., p. 530 (11th edition).

(3) The Sunday-school movement was a third agency through which Wesleyanism promoted popular education. The idea of bringing children together on Sunday for elementary and religious instruction may not have been original with those who were credited with founding the movement in 1780. From the outset of the revival its leaders had been concerned about the instruction of children. A similar idea had come to Wesley's attention through the Moravian Brethren in Germany, of which he printed an account in 1738.[1] Catechetical instruction of children by the preachers was a common practice among all the contemporary religious groups, although not in the form of an organized school. Special meetings on Sundays, for children, were conducted by Wesley[2] and by many other Methodists,[3] even by those who were not preachers.[4] None of these were organized movements and usually they confined themselves to religious instruction. As early as 1769, however, a Methodist woman at High Wycombe provided a regular school for the children of the neighbourhood, in which "the children met twice a week, every Sunday and Monday."[5]

It remains that the credit for the effective initiation of the Sunday school lies outside the Wesleyan organization. The experiment of Robert Raikes and the Rev. Thomas Stock at Gloucester was given the leverage of wide-spread publicity through the former's newspaper, and the idea spread rapidly. It is strange that an institution so

[1] W. Hobrow, *A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. J. Wesley*, p. 28. Liverpool, 1791.

[2] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. v., p. 369.

[3] *A Short Account of the Life of Mrs Mary Holden . . . by her Husband*, p. 4.

[4] George Cussons, *Memoirs*, p. 15.

[5] Joseph Cole, *Memoir of Miss Hannah Ball*, p. 84.

singularly suited to the Wesleyan purpose and genius did not command a more immediate and efficient official support. Wesley first refers to it four years later. "I find these schools springing up wherever I go," he wrote. "Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of."[1] In January 1785 he published Raikes' *An Account of the Sunday Charity Schools, lately begun in various Parts of England*, and he lost no opportunity to encourage the societies to adopt the idea. They needed little encouragement, for Methodist Sunday schools quickly multiplied. As early as 1782 the Wesleyans in the neighbourhood of Chester[2] had three schools, which may have been independent of the general movement since they were not called Sunday schools until reorganized in 1786.[3] Fletcher proposed three schools for girls and three for boys in 1783, providing instruction in reading, writing and morals as well as religion. Within a month of its establishment the Methodist Sunday school at Newcastle had an enrolment of eight hundred. Before the end of the century a central Methodist Sunday School Society was formed to co-ordinate the work in London.

The original schools proposed by Raikes taught reading and the Catechism, and the teachers were paid for their services. One of the features general to the Methodist schools was a voluntary teaching staff.[4] The content of the instruction varied. The religious and moral instruction was, of course, central. The London Sunday School Society pointed out that it was "principally engaged in superintending the formation of the children's minds, and

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 3.
[2] F. F. Bretherton, *Early Methodism In and Around Chester*, p. 226.
[3] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, pp. 107-109.
[4] Jonathan Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism*, etc., p. 342.

that spelling and reading are but trifles when placed in competition with that discipline and those instructions whereby . . . the heart may be amended, the understanding enlightened, the life reformed."[1] Protests began to be voiced against "the propriety of teaching writing and arithmetic, and other subjects on the Sabbath" after the period of Wesley,[2] and in 1814 the Conference prohibited the teaching of writing on Sunday, although it was not wholly stamped out[3]—a fact cited by Nassau Senior in 1837 as one of the grounds for the greater popularity of the Methodist and Catholic schools than those of the Establishment.[4] These protests against the teaching of anything but definitely religious subjects in the Sunday schools multiplied in the period when the more liberal groups were being forced out of the movement, which tended to crystallize into a narrow legalism after the loss of Wesley.

The service of early Wesleyanism to the Sunday-school movement was a further illustration of dependence upon local initiative. The "conduct of these and of other Sunday schools during the first twenty or thirty years of their establishment seems to have been independent of denominational control, and in many cases they appeared quite non-sectarian. It was not until 1827 that the Methodist Conference did more than advise the schools."[5] In the absence of official central direction, Wesleyans

[1] J. Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, p. 242.

[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 224; and Robert Martin, *An Address to the Superintendents, Committee and Teachers of the Methodist Sunday School in Bury, on the Impropriety and Sinfulness of Teaching Children to Write on the Lord's Day.*

[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xv., p. 220.

[4] Nassau Senior, *Letters on the Factory Acts*, p. 44.

[5] E. M. North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy*, p. 111; Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 224.

gave unstinted service to local projects. A writer in 1813 made the claim that they did "more than all the other denominations of Christians, in establishing, supporting, teaching, and encouraging Sunday Schools." [1]

The temper in which the societies conducted their Sunday-school enterprises was, by comparison, of greater significance. The instruction offered to the poor by early Wesleyans was distinguished by an absence of any condescending attitude. While a rival group were making an appeal for assistance on the ground that the Sunday-school instruction would fit the poor for an industrious life without endangering their docility, the Methodist organizers appealed to the community for support on the ground that their sole purpose would "be the universal reformation of manners, the propagation of Christian knowledge, the due observation of the Sabbath day, and the increase of valuable members to the Church and State, to religious and civil society." [2]

(*e*) No social evil in the century before Howard, Romilly and Bentham was more glaring than England's inept criminal jurisprudence and the administration of prisons. Both problems commanded the attention of the century's humanitarians. To Wesleyanism—the one large movement of the period dominated by a humanitarian motive—they were not so much problems calling for constructive solutions as a situation spurring into action the philanthropic disposition. This was again the characteristic mark of the revival. Apart from the leaven of personal character, early Methodism contributed no new methods of relief with which contemporaries were not familiar. Its claim to unique service in the matter is the strength of the

[1] Jonathan Crowther, *The Methodist Manual*, p. 214.
[2] F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, pp. 229-233.

humane attitude which it generated in the community. Its detailed record in the relief of prisoners included three kinds of activity — visitation, publicity regarding prison conditions, and approval of reform movements.

The visitation of prisons was a universal practice among early Wesleyans. It had been one of the familiar activities of the Holy Club at Oxford, and the Wesleys, through their association with Oglethorpe, may have been made aware of more constructive features of the problem. The official rules of the societies, which were standard after 1743, established "visiting or helping them that are . . . in prison" as one of the conditions of membership.[1] In 1778 the Conference asked: "Is it not advisable for us to visit all the jails we can?" and answered, "By all means. There cannot be a greater charity."[2] Preachers and private members therefore made it their constant concern. In one period of nine months it is recorded that John Wesley preached at least sixty-seven times in various gaols. Members of the societies were marked because they seemed to possess "a peculiar talent for that benevolent work."[3] Many of them visited gaols with regularity as a recognized field for pastoral work and gained considerable repute for their labours.[4] The motive of this universal practice of visiting gaols was mainly religious. The relief of material need was often a second purpose. Efforts were made to secure the release of innocent prisoners,[5] and sermons were preached to collect funds

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. viii., p. 271; vol. vii., p. 118.

[2] William Myles, *Chronological History of Methodism*, p. 137 (London, 1803); *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. viii., p. 118, "Journal of John Valton."

[3] Thomas Wood, *A Biographical Sketch . . . of the Late Mr Bundy*, p. 27.

[4] Luke Tyerman, *John Wesley*, vol. iii., p. 532; John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iii., pp. 381-387.

[5] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 230.

for the relief of poor debtors.[1] Nevertheless, most of the prison work was concentrated on the aim of persuading prisoners to become penitent. Charles Wesley's last publication was *Prayers for a Condemned Malefactor*, on which he noted: "These prayers were answered, Thursday, April 28, 1785, on nineteen malefactors, who all died penitent."[2] No organization was developed within the movement to carry on this work in a systematic manner.

The single constructive service of early Wesleyanism to the correction of prison evils was in the publicity which was given, chiefly by Wesley, to existing conditions. Their inhumanity aroused in him a bitter revulsion.[3] In January 1761 he wrote to *The London Chronicle* criticizing the degrading conditions at Newgate and pointing to the reformed Bristol Newgate, administered by a Methodist gaoler, as an example worthy of emulation by other prisons.[4] Ten years later he was still investigating and relentlessly criticising the standard of prison administration in the country.[5]

The direct relation between Wesleyanism and the organized reform movement which took shape under the indefatigable labour of Howard[6] was limited to a vigorous approval that would be certain to carry much weight wherever the influence of the societies extended. Howard himself testified that Wesley had been a source of inspiration to him and Wesley reciprocated by declaring: "Mr Howard is really an extraordinary man. God has raised

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iv., p. 416.
[2] Townsend, Workman, and Eayrs, *New History of Methodism*, vol. i., p. 241.
[3] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. iv., p. 52.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 427-428.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. v., p. 401.
[6] John Stoughton, *Howard the Philanthropist and his Friends*, pp. 152-153.

him up to be a blessing to many nations."[1] Wesleyanism did not fail to recognize the great need for widespread prison reform, for Wesley had himself publicly defined that need. Its gaol work did serve to educate the public in regard to prison conditions. But actual relief remained a problem of local initiative while Wesleyanism possessed no leadership for a political agitation. An organized programme of remedial measures was never proposed, for the very same reason that it was not attempted in other obvious social problems.

(*f*) The initial fifty years of Wesleyanism, ending with Wesley's death in 1791, lay within the century which entirely reversed its appraisal of human servitude. The Assiento, by which England gained a monopoly of the slave trade in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, was received with an acclaim matched in the enthusiasm aroused by the condemnation of that trade in the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. The latter was definitely an achievement of the popular will spurred to action by moral considerations. What contribution did Wesleyanism, the outstanding moral movement of the century, make to this process of sensitizing conscience?

The record of the early Methodist group in respect to negro slavery divides itself into two periods. During the first period, covering approximately thirty years, Wesley and his followers were outside the current of growing protest against slavery. Charles Wesley opposed the cruelties to negro slaves in South Carolina when he returned to England. John Wesley denounced the slavery of white residents in the colony. However, early Wesleyans seem to have been aware only of a concern for the spiritual interests of negro slaves. It was, in fact, an aspect of

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 438 ; *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 295.

the missionary impulse. During the second period there manifested itself a rapidly extending emphasis upon the civil status of negro slaves. The early period was nevertheless significant, because it was the basis and starting-point for the later development. For, although the occasions when negro slaves came into touch with the revival were relatively few, in practice no distinction was made between them and free men.[1] In their religious need, all men were on common ground. The nature of Wesley's attitude towards slaves while in America with Oglethorpe[2] reveals an equalitarian mood which was later reproduced in the temper of the revival's work. The common argument that negroes were not human beings was wholly repugnant to the spirit and practice of the revival. Nevertheless, during the first period there was no attempt to condemn the institution of slavery. It is true that it had been forbidden in the colony of Georgia, where Wesley laboured for a time, but this may not have made the subsequent initiators of the revival conscious of the moral aspects of negro slavery. In 1760 Wesley baptized a slaveholder and two of his slaves, without recording a protest.[3] A slaveholder was the first Methodist in the West Indies, and there rendered effective service in spreading the work of the revival. Whitefield adopted a far more positive attitude towards the institution of slavery. While he criticized the slave trade in which negroes were "brought in a wrong way from their own country,"[4] yet he approved the use of slaves emphatically, both upon grounds of scriptural authority and expediency, arguing that they were indispensable to the economy

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. i., p. 351.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 287.
[3] Charles B. Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery*, p. 41.
[4] Luke Tyerman, *Life of G. Whitefield*, vol. ii., p. 132.

of a warm climate. His zeal for the prosperity of an orphanage in Georgia even prompted him, in 1748, to use his influence to promote the introduction of slavery into the colony where it had been previously prohibited. He bequeathed fifty slaves to the Countess of Huntingdon, who added to that number by purchase. The conscience of the revival had not been sensitized to the moral issue up to 1770, when Whitefield died. It was the very group which had acknowledged the leadership of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, however, that was later to assume an energetic leadership in the abolition movement.

The second period was signalized by Wesley's awakening to the problem of slavery as a moral and political issue. The characteristic temper of the Wesleyan group would certainly have been unfriendly to any other attitude, but the movement waited upon the initiative of Wesley to crystallize its feeling into a definite policy. A growing protest against the slave trade had begun to assume the proportions of a popular movement by 1772. Sharp had previously appealed to the courts ineffectually and had undertaken to educate public sentiment, while the Somerset case had at length set the precedent against slavery in England. In this atmosphere, Wesley read an indictment of the trade by a Quaker, Anthony Benezet. It focussed all of Wesley's energies in opposition to "that execrable sum of all villanies, commonly called the Slave-trade."[1] Two years later he published *Thoughts upon Slavery*—a tract for popular consumption, phrased incisively and analysing with notable clarity the various aspects involved in the issue of slavery. It was one of the most effective pieces of anti-slavery literature produced, and it was given the widest circulation for many years. It considered and

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. v., pp. 445-446.

condemned slavery, not only on religious grounds but also on grounds of human sympathy, political right and economic expediency. The negro slave, he argued, had "the same natural right as an Englishman" to liberty, for "no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature." [1] When the war with the American colonies interrupted temporarily the market for slaves, he rejoiced that at least "the men of Africa, as well as Europe, may enjoy their native liberty." [2] To the current argument that slavery was indispensable to tropical economy he replied that wealth was of less importance to the nation than its spiritual qualities, and that, in any event, "it is not clear that we should have either less money or trade." [3] Wesley's own proposal for the solution of the problem was characteristic, because it was the essence of the Wesleyan outlook—and its weakness. The only remedy he perceived was a personal appeal to the individuals engaged in the traffic or who owned slaves. The use of organized political measures was rejected as useless.

However, having thus unequivocally defined the issue, all of the resources of the movement were increasingly enlisted in the cause. This is the one instance in which Wesley was led, at length, to encourage activity seeking changes by political agitation. Members of the societies were educated through sermons, the distribution of pamphlets, and through the pages of the *Arminian Magazine*. *Thoughts upon Slavery* was broadcast both within and outside the societies in "every part of England," [4] gaining outstanding approval even where Methodism had been condemned

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 79.
[2] *Idem*, *Journal*, vol. vi., p. 143.
[3] *Idem*, *Works*, vol. xi., p. 73.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. xii., p. 507.

customarily. The "Resolutions of the Society for the purpose of effecting the abolition of the Slave Trade" were printed in the *Arminian Magazine*,[1] in order to promote the cause among members of the societies. A subsequent issue of the magazine published a letter requesting petitions to Parliament against the slave trade.[2] In its pages there also appeared an extensive analysis, to prove that slavery was actually opposed to the material interests of England, arguing that it should be abolished on purely prudential grounds.[3]

Methodists were not hesitant in co-operating with those non-Wesleyan groups actively engaged in the anti-slavery cause. "Whatever assistance I can give those generous men who join to oppose that execrable trade, I certainly shall give," wrote Wesley.[4] He expressed to Granville Sharp his "perfect detestation of the horrid slave trade."[5] He astutely warned the leaders of the Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade that they must argue the question upon the consideration of interest as well as humanity and justice. Clarkson quoted Wesley's letters in support of his projects.[6] Wesley's last letter was to Wilberforce, adjuring him to "go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it,"[7] and Wilberforce placed so high a value upon the co-operation of Wesley and his followers that he sent anti-slavery literature to all the Methodist preachers.

[1] *Arminian Magazine* vol. xi., pp. 208-209, 1788.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 437.
[4] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 507.
[5] *Idem*, *Journal*, vol. vii., p. 333, note.
[6] Clarkson, *Abolition of the Slave Trade*, vol. i., p. 447; John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 153.
[7] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 153.

The most valuable and extensive contribution, however, was made through the regular channels of the Connexion. As early as 1780, the Conference passed a resolution condemning the trade. Days of "fasting and prayer that God would remember those poor outcasts of men," the slaves, were observed.[1] The organized effort to bring pressure by the use of a boycott of slave-produced articles was spread through the agency of the preachers. *The Arminian Magazine* reminded Methodists to ponder "how many backs have sweated, for the sweet your cane affords."[2] Individual Methodists wrote pamphlets to urge positive means of co-operation.[3] The attitude of the Wesleyan Connexion was summed up by one of the chief preachers in the year following Wesley's death. "Join your neighbours," he wrote, "in petitioning the Parliament to abolish the slave trade. . . . Abstain from the use of Rum and Sugar, till its abolition be completed. . . . Our society and constant hearers cannot fairly be estimated at less than four hundred thousand in England alone; suppose the half of these to be women, who (from might overcoming right) have no voice at present in these matters, there will remain two hundred thousand to petition, many of whom are possessed of ample fortunes and very considerable influence. . . . I have never conversed on the subject with but one Methodist in the nation, who did not avowedly oppose the slave trade. . . . Your ministers are to a man decidedly for the abolition."[4] How thoroughly members of the societies complied is

[1] John Wesley, *Journal*, vol. vii., pp. 359-360.

[2] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xiii. (1790), p. 502, "On the Slave Trade."

[3] *Early Methodist Preachers* (ed. T. Jackson), vol. vi., p. 135.

[4] Samuel Bradburn, *An Address to the People Called Methodists, concerning the Evil of Encouraging the Slave Trade*, p. 13.

indicated by the fact that later 229,426 of the 352,404 Nonconformist signatures on a petition in behalf of emancipation were Methodist.[1] The consistent support of the societies for the anti-slavery cause was so well known that preachers sent out to the West Indies were subjected to bitter persecution because it was supposed that they were agents of the Anti-Slavery Society in England, and that "their preaching to the negroes was inflammatory and socially subversive."[2]

The characteristic attitude of English Methodists was displayed by those members who were sent to the American colonies. They proved to be at least as emphatic in their anti-slavery agitation as the Wesleyans in England. As early as 1778, Asbury undertook to hold up the example of the Quakers as an essential article of Methodism; and the first conference of 1780 asserted that "slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society."[3] Many of the Methodists emancipated their slaves—an action that was imposed upon all preachers by the conference of 1780. The first general conference of 1784 determined to "take immediately some effectual method to extirpate this abomination from among us," and provided for expulsion from the societies for refusal to comply,[4] but the minute was never actually put into effect because the entrenched nature of slavery in the southern states prevented such a drastic step until the issue finally resulted in the complete disruption of the American Church.[5]

[1] J. Telford, *A Sect that Moved the World*, p. iv.
[2] Townsend, Workman, and Eayrs, *New History of Methodism*, vol. ii., p. 290.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
[5] Charles B. Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery*, p. 39.

(*g*) *Conclusion.*—The real achievement of the movement in the sphere of philanthropy was the creation of a mood and a habit. In a large and compact group of people it succeeded in making the sense of personal responsibility for the relief of social need a working attitude. Moreover, it deserves to be reiterated that the distinctive quality of the service thus inspired was not the condescending gift of alms but the spontaneous impulse of social friendliness and mutual helpfulness, manifested to persons both within and outside the societies. This was highly important. It is one of the best measures of the really humanitarian temper of the revival.

The failure of the movement, on the other hand, was its inability to translate this habitual mood into anything more than personal and ameliorative activity. Its philanthropy was characteristically individual and local, not organized and curative. It is an interesting spectacle. A great social movement which owed its existence to efficient organization more than any other one factor, creates an unparalleled philanthropic disposition and permits it to dissipate through lack of organization! It invented no new methods of service and failed to furnish the leadership in any one of the important reform movements which were being initiated contemporarily. It was content to render support, which it did magnificently, chiefly in personal ways. The explanation of this apparent singularity is at least twofold. On the one hand were the limitations of the leadership Wesley had recruited. On the other was the basic outlook of the movement as an interpretation of the Christian ethic. It was a social theory defining its approach to the solution of the community's problems through a transformation of the individual will. Hence the pre-eminent emphasis was upon personal initiative.

Moreover, a very practical political attitude determined by the surrounding circumstances tended powerfully to negate any organized action to secure reforms through political measures. It is true that there was an exception made in the case of slavery. Yet, even in that instance, an early apologist explained that "they employed it . . . because it was a religious question. They came to it, not as though they had been the disciples of the puling and sentimental Rousseau, or of the boldly infidel Paine. . . . Insisting on the moral evil of slavery, they called on the Legislature to act as it became a Legislature professing Christianity. And this was the ground on which the battle was fought and won."[1] It is, of course, open to doubt whether even this instance would have occurred if slavery had been an important domestic issue, serious in its local consequences. The American group found itself forced to compromise.

The remaining significant feature of the movement's philanthropic record is that its great equalitarian mood of social helpfulness showed signs of dilution even before the end of the period. Hand in hand with the altering economic and social status of society members, the sense of class consciousness began to assert itself. At the end of the century, after Wesley's death, philanthropy was in danger of being defined again in the old traditional terms of dutiful alms. The theory of the divine ownership was taken seriously only in the early, vital period of the revival. The transition was, of course, gradual, and the old view was never wholly displaced, but the fact of a change in the dominant view is clearly perceptible and significant.

[1] George Cubitt, *Strictures on Mr O'Connell's Letters.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIAS OF WESLEYAN LEADERSHIP

Two major influences of another kind shaped the history of the Wesleyan movement. Their contribution is essential to any appraisal both of what it achieved and why it failed to achieve more. The most obvious of those forces was the combination of a peculiarly efficient organization and the social groups which predominated in the societies' membership. The latter were unattached and rated low on the economic and social scale: they were therefore plastic material. The result was that a large and relatively neutral section of English society was disciplined into a compact, nation-wide community, focussed into self-consciousness and made a positive force in the Great Society. Effective organization was chiefly responsible for the contrast in permanent results between the work of Whitefield and the work of Wesley.

The second of those influences was the extraordinary character of the leadership which, under Wesley, moulded the growth of Wesleyanism. It brought a certain bias to the revival which served to shape its outlook and to impose very rigid limitations upon its development. There were three well-defined sections in the leadership of the movement. The first was John Wesley, surrounded by a very small group, composed chiefly of clergymen from the Established Church. The general leadership under Wesley consisted of those preachers who devoted all of their time to a supervision of the work of the societies and whose

qualifications are analysed in the following pages. The third class was the local leadership. It included local preachers, leaders of small groups—like the bands and the classes—and all those individuals who exercised initiative in some phase of the local work.

Biographical data are available for a large proportion of the men who rendered important supervisory service of considerable length to the end of the eighteenth century. Many of those who began to preach did not continue their service over a long period, owing to the rigour of privation which it involved and to their diversion into other fields. Of two hundred and twenty men who have been listed [1] in the first generation of Methodist preachers, twelve were already clergymen, sixteen were ordained during or after their connection with the Methodists, eight were expelled, a number became ministers of dissenting congregations, many turned to other occupations to earn a livelihood, and many "fell prematurely—human nature being overwhelmed with the toil." [2] Less than one-half continued in the work until death. Biographies and autobiographies for more than sixty of the regular preachers who served in the period prior to Wesley's death offer a representative and conclusive body of evidence concerning the real character of Wesleyan leadership.

1. *Social Strata from which drawn*

The economic and social strata of the families from which the preachers of the first two generations were drawn shows a marked uniformity. There was almost no representation from the groups above the roughly designated middle

[1] William Myles, *Chronological History of the People Called Methodists*, pp. 445-449. 1813.

[2] J. G. Hayman, *Methodism in North Devon*, p. 41.

class. It is equally true that very few came from the economic group lowest on the scale, contrary to the charges of contemporaries. Thirty-one of the sixty-three biographies included in the survey indicate definitely the parental occupation. Six were farmers, three were simply labourers, two were clothiers, two were shopkeepers, two were in a building trade, two kept public-houses, and each of the following claimed one representative: husbandry, gardening, woollen manufactory, pilchard-fishery, baker, mason, tradesman, cutler, tanner, carpenter, barber, "tradesman and farmer," shoemaker, school teacher. Supplementary information in the other cases seems to indicate that while one family would be classified in the "unskilled labour" grade, and no data is given in one other instance, the remaining thirty families constituted a fairly homogeneous group, ranging just below and just above the lower-middle class—that is, skilled artisans, small tradesmen and small farmers. Practically all of the regular preachers, therefore, during this period of more than fifty years, were drawn from a single social stratum, located between "unskilled labour" and the "middle class."

2. *Educational Qualifications*

The educational advantages which these preachers enjoyed were of a kind that might be inferred from the status of their families. Its extent must be viewed, however, in the eighteenth-century environment, where the standards of university training were incredibly low and where the best instruction was to be secured at a relatively small number of privately operated schools, of which the dissenting academies sustained the best reputation. Even

in this background, however, the educational opportunities of Methodism's early leaders was a very meagre one. (1) In a first group are ten who indicate that their training did not extend beyond an elementary grounding in reading, writing and possibly arithmetic. Two of them attended charity schools. One testified that at the age of twenty, "I set myself to recover my reading, which I had entirely lost."[1] One who was apprenticed at thirteen studied "writing and accounts"[2] in the evening, while the son of a cutler remarks: "There was no care taken of my education."[3] Another asserts that his education consisted in "not much more than reading and writing."[4] The remainder indicate that they had been taught at least enough to read the Bible. (2) A second group includes the largest number. In these cases the length of their early study is indicated but not its nature. Some of them attended charity schools, while the others were instructed in those fee-charging schools characteristic of the century, which ranged in efficiency and standards from the instruction offered by irresponsible individuals to the excellent training of the academies. Three attended school until they were thirteen, seven until fourteen, three until fifteen, two until sixteen, one until nineteen, and one simply for "some years." The limits within which the quality of instruction of this class varied are illustrated by the testimonies given. One, who was "put to school" till "near fourteen," remarks that he failed to gain much "proficiency" because the teacher was "given to drink to excess."[5] It is safe to say that in most instances the

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xxi., p. 4, 1798.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 530, 1779.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 13, 1783.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. xxi., p. 474, 1798.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 541, 1778.

schools attended were not among the best available during the period. (3) A third group of eight make little or no direct reference to educational advantages, but other data indicate that their instruction was of the most elementary sort. One was apprenticed at ten, one at twelve, two at thirteen, three at fourteen and one at eighteen (who had been given "such learning as was thought necessary").[1] (4) A fourth group of seven included one whose education had been "not classical" but had qualified him to serve as secretary to a Justice of the Peace[2] and another who had received sufficient education to act as agent for a gentleman of property; one who read much as a boy; one who had learned only what his father could teach him; one son of a public-house keeper who preached "without going to the College,"[3] and two who had started to school early but had been forced to discontinue for economic reasons. (5) A small group of six indicate definitely that they received an education above the mediocre average. Two had been educated in anticipation of taking Orders in the Church; one attended a "Latin school" for a time; another attended several schools and was given private tutoring but had no taste for study; one was sent to an "Academy for Drawing" (after attending an elementary school), and one was of a French immigrant family who was sent to various schools in France. (6) The remaining group of fifteen make no reference to their educational advantages. Their records, however, make it clear that they were afforded no greater privileges than those in the other groups.

There is therefore very little variation in the records of the initial educational qualifications of Wesley's early

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. ii., pp. 25-40, 129-146, 1779.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. xvii., p. 474, 1794.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 579, 1784.

preachers. Practically all of them acquired the basis of an elementary education and a few of them the bare rudiments of a classical one.[1] This, it is important to notice, is not a complete picture. It represents only the preliminary training which they brought to their work. Under the impact of Methodism, and especially the constant goading of Wesley, their education was a continuous growth. The assiduity with which many of these leaders undertook to improve the standard of their intellectual life is one of the notable features of the revival. "They are not so ignorant as is industriously and maliciously represented," declared the youthful Sadler, partly because many of them "have, by their industry, made themselves superior to their adversaries in this respect."[2] Some of them became men of impressive learning, and many more evidenced intellectual distinction in other ways.[3] Nevertheless the initial educational qualifications are relevant to the question of the bias of outlook which their leadership brought to the movement.

3. *Prior Occupations*

The occupational background of the men who were to serve as the movement's leaders obviously contributed to the quality of their leadership. During the first thirty years after the use of unordained preachers had been inaugurated many of them apportioned their time between service under Wesley and their former modes of earning a livelihood. In 1768 this was definitely forbidden, and the full-time preachers, or itinerants, devoted all their energies to the single task. Practically none of these leaders was trained specifically for this service, but were drawn from other

[1] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xv., pp. 88-89.
[2] Michael Thomas Sadler, *An Apology for the Methodists*, p. 14.
[3] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. xv., pp. 85-92.

fields of labour. An analysis of the data available in the sixty-three instances under survey reveals again that they constituted a fairly homogeneous group. A large proportion of them served apprenticeships in the various trades. Only thirteen fail to specify their occupations. Seven were employed in branches of textile production; four were farmers (on occasion with supplementary activities); five had served as soldiers in the army (previous to which at least three had been employed as a gardener, mason and baker respectively); three had taught school; two had been miners; two had worked in printing establishments; seven are designated simply as "tradesmen"; while two who served apprenticeships fail to indicate the trade. In addition, each of the following occupations claimed one: baker, "taylor," mason, "building business," cabinetmaker and joiner, carpenter, wheelwright, pilchard-fishery, shopkeeper, mechanic, barber, china manufacture, sailor and servant-companion. Four indicate that they were in commercial employment: one as secretary to a Justice of the Peace, one as agent of a "gentleman of property," one as a regimental assistant-paymaster, and one as a storekeeper for the East India Company.

It is apparent from this record that the economic status of the majority of the early Methodist preachers was in that social grade which includes skilled artisans, small farmers, and tradesmen in business for themselves in a modest way. In some instances these men had prospered notably, and had raised their social standing; but none of them belonged to the professional class or the upper social grades. A few belonged to the middle class, and most of them were occupationally located on the level just below that group.

4. *Religious Background*

The religious background of the early preachers reveals two important facts bearing upon the orientation of outlook in the Wesleyan societies. The first of these is that the parentage of these leaders was preponderantly Anglican and only sparsely from Dissent. The following table indicates the distribution indicated by the cases in review:

Anglican.	26
Methodist	8
Roman Catholic	3
Dissent	8
Presbyterian Anglican, 1	
Presbyterian, 2	
Scotland, 1	
Roman Catholic Anglican, 1	
Independent, 1	
Particular Anabaptist, 1	
Quaker, 1	
Not indicated	18
	63

When it is added that most of those listed as Methodist were also Anglican in affiliation, and that the largest proportion of the unclassified group was probably connected with the Establishment, it becomes clear that whatever bias of leadership was involved in early association and training would be exerted by influences dominated by the tradition of the Establishment.

The second noteworthy fact bearing upon the temper of this leadership, as well as upon the place of the revival in the stream of English religious tradition, is that these men

brought to the movement a well-defined type of religious consciousness, the nature of which tended to narrow their conception of what constituted the legitimate sphere of the religious life. Practically all of the group came from families in which the religious interest was strong. Only one individual of the entire group denies that his childhood was made aware of religious need. In four cases there is no record. In eight cases it is noted that they were brought up "in the fear of God." But in fifty cases it is specifically asserted that childhood was marked by religious distress, intense spiritual hunger and overwhelming fear. Allowance must, of course, be made for the fact that all of these biographies were written after the revival had stamped its brand upon every thought of these men, so that they were in danger of projecting much of the present feeling into the past. But even considering this fact, the degree that the sense of religious hunger of a definite sort becomes evident here is remarkable. "The spirit of the Lord was striving with me ever since I was six or seven"[1] is a sensitiveness of a kind that is voiced repeatedly by Anglican and Dissenter alike. The uncertainty of life bore heavily upon all groups. "I was in great bondage through fear of death from my infancy" is the tone adopted in most of the testimonies. Even one of the Roman Catholic representatives declared that, "while I was young and ignorant, God . . . often terrified my heart; especially when I thought of the day of judgment, and of eternity."[2] The work of the revival inevitably represented to these men the fulfilment of this well-defined need. It restricted their outlook. It limited their usefulness. In the light of this background it is not difficult to

[1] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. xiv., p. 461, 1791.
[2] *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers* (ed. T. Jackson), vol. iii., p. 16.

understand why some of these men should feel compelled to criticize even Wesley on the ground of too great a breadth, and of interest in things which were not clearly relevant to the religious life.

5. *Leadership-making Process*

In its effect upon the sentiments of the average man in the Wesleyan movement, and in its influence upon the temper of the social service of the revival, the process by which leaders were made was important. They were not created by arbitrary authority so much as designated by the self-expressed forces of the revival. Almost without exception, they were men who were accorded a natural leadership by their fellow-members in the small groups, and then they grew up through the enlarging units of the societies until, at length, by the logic of events, they became the general leaders. Of the sixty-three instances under survey, three came to Wesley from service in other religious societies, four had engaged in religious work while soldiers, and four do not indicate the process by which they became preachers. All of the remaining fifty-two served an apprenticeship in the societies' ranks and graduated from stage to stage by a gradual growth. From a display of initiative in the smallest group, they became band or class leaders, exhorters, and then served as local preachers within striking distance of their secular employment. At length, after a period varying in time, but sometimes extending over years, they became itinerant preachers, by the appointment of Wesley and the Conference. It was an instance of complete equality of opportunity and democratic mobility. Some felt definitely that they ought to preach and were given a test when they sought it. Others

were reluctant to accept the responsibility and only pressure availed to enlist them in the service. In most cases it was wholly a case of natural selection. In any event, the movement's leaders were not imposed upon it from above. It made its leaders.

6. *Local Leadership*

The local leadership contributed much in moulding the outlook of the revival, and exercised an influence greater in certain respects than the regular preachers. It was responsible for by far the larger part of the actual work performed. The qualifications and bias which these local leaders brought to the movement was therefore highly important. Concrete data are not available in so comprehensive a form as that for the regular preachers. Nevertheless the main features of the matter are clearly established. They make a definitive addition to the body of evidence which explains the course and limits of the Wesleyan revival.

7. *Local Preachers*

At the outset, the distinction between the travelling and the local preachers was not so wide, since for the first thirty years many of the regular preachers divided their time between the work of the societies and their secular occupations. Moreover, most of the regular preachers had graduated through the local-preacher stage, and to that extent are also representative of this latter class. The chief difference between the influence of the two groups was in respect to the classes they represented. Unlike the regular preachers, the local leadership was not drawn exclusively from a single social group. On the contrary,

it reflected all of the levels of social and economic status from which Wesleyanism drew its membership. Doubtless one of the reasons why the full-time preachers came so largely from a single social group is that when they belonged to a higher social status they underwent the necessary preparation and took Orders in the Church. In the first half-century of the movement twenty-five such cases are recorded. Others were drawn into the dissenting ministry. That left the general leadership of Wesleyanism to be drawn from a relatively uniform class. In the local field these considerations did not operate. Almost from the beginning, and increasingly in the course of the century, Wesleyanism made an appeal to the middle, professional and upper classes, while large numbers of the Methodists moved up in social status through their own efforts. But Wesley consistently stressed the movement's ministry to the lower economic classes, and hence at all times they constituted the bulk of the societies. The local preachers faithfully reflected this situation. Many of them were very poor, and had but the slightest education.[1] Most of them found regular employment as skilled artisans, small tradesmen and farmers. A collier,[2] a brass-caster,[3] a toymaker,[4] a farmer,[5] a baker,[6] a cabinetmaker,[7] a printer,[8] a schoolmaster,[9] a bookseller[10]—these are but random samples which illustrate the fact that a list of the local

[1] Stephen Tuck, *Methodism in Frome*, p. 96.
[2] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. vi., p. 109.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. iv., p. 199.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., p. 109.
[5] *Ibid.*, vol. iii., p. 106.
[6] *Ibid.*, vol. vii., p. 66.
[7] W. H. Thompson, *Early Chapters in Hull Methodism*, p. 24.
[8] James Everett, *Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield*, etc., pp. 223-224.
[9] F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, p. 150.
[10] Thomas Jackson, *Recollections of My Own Life and Times*, p. 34.

preachers would be a catalogue of current occupations. But the record would also include men from the professions,[1] while many of the most effective local preachers came from families of wealth and prominence in the community.[2] It could be said of "a gentleman of great respectability and wealth" that he "was one of the first and most laborious local preachers in these parts."[3] Men who were prominent in civic life served the societies in that capacity. The first local preacher in Bedford was also Mayor, as early as 1757.[4] Prospering Methodists built chapels at their own expense, and served faithfully as local preachers over long periods.[5] Dividing their time between local service to the societies and their own interests, the records of these local preachers from the higher social groups constitute one of the most significant instances of the power of the revival to dissolve completely the sense of class barriers and social inequalities. Their philanthropic activities went hand in hand with their spiritual ministrations to demonstrate their sense of classlessness.[6] With the increasing prosperity of Methodists a larger number of the local preachers seem to have been drawn from this group. "The local preachers . . . are, in general, men of good talents," declared an authority at the turn of the century. "Being engaged in business, many of them are

[1] A. Watmough, *A History of Methodism in the Town and Neighbourhood of Great Yarmouth*, p. 32; G. J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel, London, and its Associations*, p. 87; W. W. Stamp, *The Orphan House of Wesley*, pp. 245-246.

[2] W. Pilkington, *The Makers of Wesleyan Methodism in Preston*, p. 17; F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, pp. 199-202.

[3] J. B. Dyson, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Congleton Circuit*, p. 70.

[4] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. ii., p. 124.

[5] *Ibid.*, vol. iv., pp. 221-222.

[6] Samuel Dunn, *Memoirs of Mr Thomas Tatham, and of Wesleyan Methodism in Nottingham.*

opulent, and exceedingly useful. They frequently ride twenty or thirty miles on a Sunday and preach twice or thrice, without the smallest pecuniary compensation."[1] This tendency is in accord with the other data which reflect changing conditions in the second period of Methodism.

It is impossible to give the exact number of local preachers who served during the first fifty years. It was estimated at the close of the century that they numbered nearly two thousand.[2] It was claimed that they did "two-thirds of the public work,"[3] and held five of the seven services conducted by early Wesleyanism.[4] The local preachers were not, of course, in a position to initiate general policies or programmes. They were in fact a conservative drag upon the temper of the societies.[5] They worked under the authority of the regular preachers. But they constituted a singularly clear demonstration of the intrinsically democratic processes of the Wesleyan movement.

8. *Class Leaders and Initiators*

The small groups into which each society was divided for purposes of intimate fellowship, discipline and social service were presided over by a multitude of class leaders. This function was far more than a preparatory school for the local and travelling preachers. The persons who performed it were nearest to the rank and file of the

[1] Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism*, etc., pp. 22-23.
[2] David Simpson, *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings*, p. 76.
[3] William Hatton, *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of Local Preachers*, p. 46.
[4] Townsend, Workman, and Eayrs, *New History of Methodism*, vol. i., p. 292.
[5] William Hatton, *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of Local Preachers*, p. 57.

movement, and were drawn from every conceivable occupation. A class leader was advised: "You do not act as a superior, but an equal," performing an "act of friendship and love."[1] The chief qualifications were common sense, a flair for initiative and a positive religious experience. It was even possible for a man to become a class leader who could neither read nor write.[2] By a process of natural selection, however, the better qualified were pushed to the front. In the biographies of successful Methodists their service as class leader is a usual item. The achievement of a status of respectability, which was for early Methodism both a goal and a degradation, was often linked up with the success of men who had been intimately connected with the movement in the capacity of local leadership.[3] By the end of the century there must have been at least eight thousand of these leaders of small groups. Nothing could better illustrate the premium which early Wesleyanism placed on initiative and the unlimited opportunity which it afforded for training in leadership.

The record of those persons who were responsible for the initiation of new classes and societies serves to reveal again how characteristically the movement created its own leadership from within. Rich and poor, cultured and uneducated, all became ardent propagandists, bent not only on building up local societies but founding new groups wherever possible. A poor pedlar,[4] or an impoverished widow,[5] or a family servant

[1] John Wesley, *Works*, vol. xii., p. 209.
[2] Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 34.
[3] J. B. Dyson, *Methodism in Congleton*, p. 70; *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. vi., p. 132.
[4] Stephen Tuck, *Methodism in Frome*, pp. 10-11.
[5] A. Watmough, *Methodism in Lincoln*, p. 15.

were as instrumental in planting new societies as the appointed evangelists.[1] In a group of societies chosen at random, the founders included a carpenter,[2] a schoolmaster-shepherd,[3] a retired soldier,[4] an upholsterer,[5] a tailor,[6] a tanner,[7] a piece-maker,[8] a handloom weaver,[9] a cordwainer,[10] a cooper,[11] a grocer-breadbaker,[12] and a brazier.[13] Small farmers appear to have been particularly active.[14] Frequently the record indicates that the initiative for the formation of a new society rested with persons of affluence who invited the preachers to their communities[15] or opened their own houses for services.[16] Often they built chapels at their own expense for a local society.[17] Wesley's characteristic bias in favour of the poor was indicated on one occasion when " some wealthy

[1] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., p. 71.

[2] L. M. Senior, *People in our Circuit: Reminiscences of Methodist Life*, pp. 3-4.

[3] Thomas Jackson, *Recollections of My Own Life and Times*, p. 23.

[4] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., p. 59.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[6] James Everett, *Methodism in Sheffield*, pp. 91-92.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[8] W. W. Stamp, *Historical Notices of Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford and its Vicinity*, p. 42.

[9] W. Pilkington, *The Makers of Wesleyan Methodism in Preston*, p. 122.

[10] George Lester, *Grimsby Methodism*, etc., pp. 16-17.

[11] Richard Treffry, *Memoirs of Mr Richard Trewavas*, etc.

[12] Thomas Hargreaves, *The Rise and Progress of Wesleyan Methodism in Accrington*, p. 34.

[13] A. Watmough, *Methodism in Great Yarmouth*, p. 72.

[14] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., p. 117; vol. v., p. 187; vol. viii., p. 135; Daniel McAllum, *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Death of the Rev. H. Taft*, pp. 2-9; Thomas Jackson, *Life of the Rev. Robert Newton, D.D.*, p. 5.

[15] *Arminian Magazine*, vol. viii., p. 334; A. Watmough, *Methodism in Lincoln*, p. 32.

[16] W. Pilkington, *Methodism in Preston*, p. 106; F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, p. 28.

[17] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iii., p. 200; vol. iv., p. 164.

landowners and cheese factors" were responsible for beginning a society which, because its initiators were rich, Wesley predicted would not prosper, as indeed it proved.[1] This was not, however, the case invariably. A Methodist who was a "banker, spent some of his best energy in the evangelizing of" a community that subjected him to some of the rough treatment meted out to humbler workers.[2] Prosperous Methodists often took the lead personally in initiating the work of societies in their communities.[3]

9. *Women in Leadership*

The extent to which women were accorded positions of leadership in this early period was another of the factors which added to the vitality of the movement. It was again a notable instance of unrestricted opportunity and levelling sentiment. The employment of women as leaders of classes composed exclusively of women was not unnatural. But the extent to which they were permitted to assume the initiative elsewhere in the societies often gave them a working equality with men which was, in the circumstances, an evidence of the realistic attitude toward personality which dominated Wesleyanism. All over the country there were societies formed on the initiative of women who needed no other authority than their own impulse and determination.[4] A servant girl,[5] an itinerating

[1] *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iv., pp. 84-85.

[2] W. H. Thompson, *Early Chapters in Hull Methodism*, pp. 38-39.

[3] F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, pp. 58, 197; Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield*, p. 75.

[4] A. Watmough, *Methodism in Lincoln*, pp. 23-25; Joseph Cole, *Memoirs of Miss Hannah Ball*, p. 157.

[5] W. Pilkington, *Methodism in Preston*, p. 14.

carder and spinner,[1] or a housewife,[2] was not less acceptable than a woman of social position and influence[3] or a member of the aristocracy.[4] Wealthy women also built chapels for local societies, at their own expense.[5] The outstanding success of women as class leaders was evident,[6] but a few women even undertook to serve as local preachers.[7] It was a bold innovation even in the age of the blue-stockings, but Wesley based his approval of their conduct on scriptural precedent, and the fact that the women possessed an "extraordinary call" exactly like all the rest of the unordained preachers.[8] It was again only after the period of Wesley's active guidance and the spontaneous early stages of Wesleyanism that the opportunity for feminine initiative became more restricted. It was claimed that "a vast majority of" the people were opposed to it, and, in any event, declared the Minutes of the Conference in 1803, the preaching of women "does not at all seem necessary; there being a sufficiency of Preachers, whom God has accredited." Even then, in the light of eighteenth-century achievements, the Conference felt compelled to admit uneasily that a woman might claim an "extraordinary call," but, in that event, it was added, "we are of the opinion she should in general address her own sex, and those only."[9] This

[1] George Jackson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the Darlington Circuit*, p. 13.
[2] John Taylor, *The Apostles of Fylde Methodism*, p. 53.
[3] Agnes Bulmer, *Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Mortimer*.
[4] John Lancaster, *The Life of Darcy, Lady Maxwell*, p. 35.
[5] Mrs Richard Smith, *Raithby Hall*, etc., p. 72; F. F. Bretherton, *Methodism in Chester*, pp. 194-195.
[6] *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Mary Taft*. Written by Herself.
[7] John Taylor, *The Apostles of Fylde Methodism*, pp. 57-60; *W.H.S. Proceedings*, vol. iii., p. 74; vol. x., p. 109.
[8] Jonathan Crowther, *The Methodist Manual*, p. 16.
[9] Philip Garrett, *A Digest of the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First . . . in the Year 1744 to the Year 1826*, pp. 96-97.

is another item of the evidence which marks the stultification of the liberal impulse after the vitalistic period of the movement which coincided with the leadership of John Wesley.

10. *Leadership and the Limits of a Programme*

The unusual character of this leadership was important in two ways. In the first place, it details one of the reasons for the equalitarian mood of the early societies. By an intensely democratic process the movement produced its own leaders. The enterprise was a venture in mutual service and there was therefore no channel by which the sense of inferiority, with a religious sanction, could be conveyed to the rank and file by benevolently minded but superior leaders who felt impelled to do something for the less fortunate. There were no Hannah Mores in the Wesleyan group, and leadership that was prompted by superior but pious patronage was confined to another section of the revival. Early Methodism was, in a real sense, a movement of and by the poor. Its leaders were enjoined to "do nothing as a gentleman," because they were the "servants of all."[1] Indeed, when members of the middle and upper classes were drawn into its radius, they accepted the authority of the less-cultured and poorer men who constituted the general leadership under Wesley. Added to this was the amazing encouragement given to initiative, regardless of social qualifications, by which opportunity for acquiring position and prestige in an extensive community was without restriction of class.

In the second place, the nature of Wesleyan general leadership is one more factor which helps to explain the

[1] *W.H.S. Publications*, "John Bennet's Minutes of 1744." 1896.

limitation of outlook in the revival, especially in its political aspects. The men who set the pace did not possess the background, training, or inclination to stimulate Wesley's liberal temper to a wider reach. They belonged to a group which became politically sensitive only after a slow process of educative growth. Most of them were far removed from the conditions which produced London radicalism. They shared in a simple but deep tradition of loyalty. Affiliated with the Establishment, they were therefore not partners to any resentment against discrimination which educated dissent to political opposition. In most cases they started from a tradition of piety which tended to narrow rather than to expand men's secular interests. Their family histories and personal experiences made the present problems of the economic life as full of meaning as a programme of political initiative in the eighteenth-century context was to them meaningless. They brought to their leadership of the societies little capacity for critical thought, but intense awareness of the problems of gaining a livelihood and an emotional religious need cast in the mould of the Puritan tradition. All of this was conducive to a ready absorption of the temper which Wesley and his colleagues established as the characteristic mood and programme of the movement. It also constituted a limitation on the development of any wider project, which was nearly insuperable.

C. CONCLUSION

CHAPTER IX

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WESLEYANISM TO THE NEW SOCIAL VALUES

THE social importance of the Wesleyan movement is not discoverable in a bare analysis of each isolated aspect of its record. Neither can the service of the movement to those fresh appraisals of the liberal spirit, which emerged from the eighteenth century, be viewed as an independent process. Only in the perspective of a society forming about new economic forces can the debt of the new outlook to the religious revival be assessed.

1. *Summary of the Wesleyan Social Attitude*

Secular affairs loomed large as natural interests in eighteenth-century Methodism. That fact earned for the the new religious community a social meaning beyond the limits of sectarian history. The movement propagated a moral theory of society derived in principle from the Christian ethic and moulded in its form by contemporary circumstances. The substance of that theory is concentrated in the proposition that the institutions and processes of society are but the tools of human will. They are justified only in the degree that they are useful in promoting genuine happiness. All social forms are not only secondary, but they are also capable of perversion by men. The prime condition of social health, therefore, is declared to be a defined sort of social character. The

moralized initiative of the individual is predicated as the mainspring of social welfare. The Christian religious experience is the source from which that social character proceeds. The application of this principle of moral individualism to civic affairs was then made as logically and extensively as lay within the competence of Wesleyan leadership.

Unfortunately, a second doctrine disputed the monopoly of this theory of society. The axiom that an ethical purpose is inseparable from political processes was confused by the idea of an inscrutable providence controlling human affairs. The consequences of conflicting principles were partially avoided during the first half of the century by three qualifying conditions. Wherever possible Providence was identified with moral action. Then the function of Government was, in effect, limited to police, on the assumption that, given civic order, the positive conditions of freedom lay outside the sphere of political activity. In any event, it was argued that because of moral and mental incompetence the uninformed and unsocialized individual could advance no defensible claim to participate in Government.

One realm of freedom to which Wesleyan leaders, therefore, diverted individual initiative was the economic life. Affirming the natural beneficence of economic institutions, and characteristically locating the evils flowing from economic causes in a perverted human will, it was argued that the industrial virtues were also the Christian virtues. Economic security was emphasized as an important condition of civic liberty, and those energies which were restrained in a narrow field of politics were given full rein in the sphere of economics. The social theory was then completed by treating the problem of the

distribution of wealth in the light of the central place assigned to moralized will and a theory of divine ownership. These two demanded that the possessions of the individual, beyond his frugal needs, be devoted to the needs of the community as the appointed beneficiary of a Divine proprietor.

In general, this describes the working outlook which controlled the Wesleyan group before the Napoleonic period. Its members avoided political aggressiveness and gave a pious loyalty to existing authority. Focussing their attention upon the affairs of the economic life, for which their habits and outlook peculiarly fitted them, they exercised an amazing initiative in the expanding industrial community. This produced a mass improvement in their social status, and by it they achieved that power and prestige which would have been a more distant goal through political agitation. Finally, a notable philanthropic mood and record testify to the literal acceptance of the last article of the Wesleyan ideal which directed the delivery of surplus wealth to the community's use. Before the advancing prosperity of Wesleyans, however, this final tenet could not stand unimpaired. The implication of a practical economic equality was, therefore, progressively rejected. Early Wesleyan theory as a vital factor was supplanted at the end of the century by a more comfortable doctrine. Theological literalism rose to take the place of an ethical theory of society. An unmoralized Providence was made central to explain what had formerly been subjected to a moral test of validity. The standards and outlook of the leaders of the Wesleyans tended to reflect those of the ruling section of the community. The uniqueness of the new movement as a programme of social reform was adulterated into a pale hue of respectability.

2. *Impact upon Evolving Liberal Values*

The direct bearing of the early Wesleyan movement upon the process of changing social standards was twofold. It helped to disintegrate those earlier social conditions which had blocked any re-appraisal of the community's values, while it fostered a situation that made a new outlook inevitable.

(1) The root of the old values had been the economic helplessness and the corresponding political impotence of the masses. The correlation of social privilege and economic power made a greater dispersion of the latter the first condition of advance. The Wesleyan movement depended for its membership and most of its general leadership upon that class of inarticulate citizens commonly regarded as "the inferior parts of society." The record makes clear how effectually the religious impulse impelled them to win a new status for themselves in the community. The diversion of attention from political interests, which held little promise of profit, to an aggressive initiative in the world of business enterprise, led to independence, an improved standard of living, and unlimited social opportunity. Religious experience served as the stimulant of that social mobility which is an invariable symptom of free initiative and liberal sentiment.

(2) The conservative tradition may have been inequitable, but it did reflect actual mental and moral qualities in the multitude which helped to explain their impotence. A disciplined character and a better-informed intelligence conditioned the rejection of the tradition. No single agency in the century operated so potently to effect the moral transformation of the people as the forces of the revival. It provided both incentive and guidance. It

awakened men and made them conscious of latent strength. It bred in them a sense of personal obligation to serve a meaningful function in society. In its every assumption was the obliteration of that feeling of inferiority which the possessing groups had encouraged in order to promote obedience and content among the people. To an eventful emotional religious experience were added the influences of a religious community, nation-wide and efficiently organized, which schooled men, formerly insensitive, to an aggressive self-respect. The organized life of the societies was an educative experience in group action. Through it individuals received an insistent goading to mental activity by means of the friction of contacts, the comparison of experiences and stimulated ambitions. The step from responsible character to a position of power in the community may not always have been abrupt, but it was inevitable.

(3) The religious movement was an infectious innovation in the English scene, spreading its contagion in opposition to the prevailing sentiment against change. The century had opened with a passion against novelty, which drew its strength from memories of the Civil War and from the conserving alliance of groups issuing from 1688. Methodism was subjected to its most violent test by the current hatred of enthusiasm—a term synonymous with recognizable initiative. It contributed to the innovating mood of the new age by successfully challenging that prejudice.

(4) A fourth bulwark to the illiberal values had been the appeal to religion which, in the name of a remnant of the Calvinistic tradition, condemned any impulse to question the authority of the existing order. After the vital period of Wesleyanism this leverage against change

could never again pass current as respectable without criticism. Wesleyans rejected not only the prime tenet of divine ordination in respect to salvation, but they also grew to maturity in an atmosphere devoid of the Calvinistic assumptions by which the conservative tradition had been defended. Nothing is more characteristic of early Methodism than an assumption of equality, manifested as axiomatic. Divine ordination of status lost caste. It is true that a changed Wesleyanism returned to this tool of the conservative mentality at the end of the century, but the effect of its emphatic rejection during the first fifty years was so great that the doctrine never again could recover its early potency.

(5) A buttress of the existing order at the opening of the eighteenth century had been the expert judgment, in support of dominant bias, that class exploitation was necessary to the health of the economic order, and that great economic inequalities were therefore inescapable. Wesleyanism did not, of course, undertake to refute any particular form of the mercantilist economics. It pursued a more effective course by powerfully aiding in the creation of those conditions which were a complete refutation of current mercantilist doctrines of labour subjection. Both the Wesleyan teaching and temper were vehement denials of the legitimacy of the exploitation of any group for the benefit of another. A practical equality was premised. Economic power was itself insistently defined solely in terms of ethical obligation.

At all these points Wesleyanism made vigorous contributions to the process which undermined the foundations of the old standards and made new values of spirit and personality supreme. The very character of the movement compelled it to be a liberal force, because it created the

context of liberalism. Yet all of its labels were conservative. It shunned any appearance of an alliance with those groups admittedly committed to an agitation for a new political system. Some members of the early period who were aware of the issue were openly friendly to the early radical movement, and in their espousal they were left unmolested. But such support was individual and indirect, and, on the whole, the societies' membership had not acquired any consciousness of constructive political interests. Wesleyanism made no contribution to the formulation of a radical philosophy. In fact, while liberal in its tendencies, it yet combated the particular doctrines advanced by early radicals. Its liberalism was unlabelled and therein lay its power, for, unperceived, it spread a germinating influence. Priestley, the radical, gauged accurately what but few others saw when he predicted that Wesleyan Methodism would accomplish far more than its leaders could foresee,[1] even while clothed in its conservative disguise. Yet, in turn, that very disguise enabled Wesley's successors to make a movement conservative and reactionary, which, in its inherent nature, had been educatively radical.

3. *The Unity of Humanitarian Tendencies*

These contributions from Wesleyanism were definitive and substantial. But they fall far short of an adequate explanation of the sources of vitality in eighteenth-century humanitarianism. In no single instance was the contribution of the religious movement isolated from the surrounding developments of the period. There was a larger process in

[1] Joseph Priestley, *Familiar Letters Addressed to the People of Birmingham*, p. 56. 1790.

which new moods and corresponding habits were emerging. Old values were being discarded as no longer defensible. There was a certain working unity in the contemporary forces which were remaking the community's standards. Inclusive tendencies manifested themselves in ways which varied according to the agency through which they extended their influence. The wider distribution of economic power, carrying with it an extension of social opportunity and mobility, was a many-sided movement to which the revival added its influence. The correlation between it and the Wesleyan impulse details the manner in which economic developments aided the expansion of Methodism, while, in turn, the latter was promoting material prosperity. The altering physical structure of the community tended to force a break in the monopoly of civic authority in favour of the unpropertied. That shift provided the religious forces with their opportunity, while they, in turn, co-operated in the vital process of integration within the newly congested areas. At the outset of the century the irresponsible character of many poor contributed to their civic helplessness, while their helplessness fostered their irresponsibility. Social character was really inconsistent with economic insecurity and civic insignificance. A multitude of influences converged to correct this determinant of illiberalism. The religious impulse of the century performed one notable service to that end. The balance of forces issuing from 1688 as a bulwark of the existing political stratification was but a tentative affair, only awaiting stabilization in the nation and the accentuation of divisive interests to disappear in the course of the century. The conservative tradition was progressively weakened by the repeated blows of innovation which appear more numerous the more closely the

period is scrutinized. Wesleyanism was one of those innovations, as were the movement in literature, the growth of organs of public information, the evolution of new political forms, the mitigation of the uncertainty of life through hygienic and material improvements, the technical inventions and those activities which announced the emergence of a new middle class to power, to pave the way for a recognition of the rights of personality. The Calvinistic tradition which entrenched groups at the opening of the period wielded to secure their proprietory superiority, possessed so little vitality that it was dissolving in the face of the fluid conditions which followed. Wesleyanism aided in its rejection as an instrument of ordained exploitation. New economic conditions proceeded to undermine the assumption of the economists and vested interests that the limited resources of the community necessitated class subjugation and exploitation.

Wesleyanism worked with a multitude of other forces to make a new community. In its turn, its strength lay not in a sudden eruption of novel forces but in its intimate dependence upon the existing social context. The religious impulse itself did not suddenly appear unheralded. There existed widely a definite type of religious consciousness and a generally shared feeling of a defined religious need. That feeling evidenced itself in sporadic attempts to satisfy the need. Wesleyanism was one of those attempts which absorbed others and succeeded permanently, mainly because of its superior genius of leadership. It is clear that its contribution to the whole sociological process, in which a new set of social values was made dominant, lay not in any exclusive service but in the friendliness of its influence to contemporary trends.

Its claim to a unique contribution thus rests rather upon

the efficient manner in which it brought its influence to bear upon the community than in the kind of service rendered to the process. There is, however, one immensely important factor to support the Wesleyan claim to uniqueness in the humanitarian development. It bred into every phase of its work the equalitarian assumption. Any other attitude was incongruously foreign to the spirit of the early societies. So far as the records reveal, the category of inferiority was unknown to the motives of Wesleyans.

4. *Social Values in the Industrial Revolution*

It is clear, however, that if the weight of Wesleyan influence during the first fifty years was on the side of the emerging values, it likewise harboured the seeds of reaction. The social theory which the movement received from tradition was a house divided against itself. There could be no lasting truce between meaningless prescription and moral authority in the life of society. Genius saved the movement from bibliolatry in the initial stage, but the mood of uncritical literalism was present awaiting the favourable moment which arrived with prosperity and respectability. The systematic diversion of interest away from politics, even by members of the societies acting in their individual capacities, was probably expedient in the eighteenth century, but it was soon evident that political agitation had become the chief agent of an aggressive policy of social justice. Then it was that literalism divorced from common sense and the policy of political abstention were crystallized into doctrines of repressive conservatism openly ranged against the liberal agencies of the new community.

No modern movement was presented with an equal

opportunity. It was the one fresh and vigorous religious impulse present when the new economic processes were moulding the nation. It is true that the members of the societies constituted no more than a small minority of the community. It is even probable that an unyielding insistence upon its moral programme might have so diffused the movement's energies as to render it futile. Yet it did possess the mystical power to make social motives workable. That alone was qualification enough to warrant a test. It is possible that it could have made no difference in averting that heritage which the industrial revolution bequeathed to the modern world in the form of vast processes uninformed by responsibility to the community. Perhaps the dispersion of economic power was too patchy not to provoke envy and too recent to earn disillusionment. In that case it would have been useless to attempt to discipline the acquisitive impulse to a social purpose. Wesley saw that the triumph of the Christian ethic was bound up with its ability to create desires beneficent to society. For the same reason he realized that there were certain kinds of inequalities which were fatal to its social programme. His successors failed to grasp these fundamentals. They compromised. They courted respectability. They chose the easier task, as though a mystical intensity could compensate for the loss of moral imperatives.

The result was that a movement which might have forced a real recognition of the claims of social justice, and compelled the new society to rear itself in an atmosphere of moral responsibility, missed its opportunity. It became a powerful organization which, dedicated to a spiritual end, was always sincere but often insensitive. Intensely loyal to a method of personal regeneration, the content of its programme was ever in danger of proving

sterile in the context of social problems which demanded a plastic intelligence for their solution. It awakened in its followers a hunger which, here and there, led them to stumble upon the meaning of the Christian ethic, only to be worn down in their almost futile protest against the paralysing inertia of a social system careless of spiritual values. It was less the method that failed than its inert and doctrinaire application. Perhaps, however, no greater tribute can be voiced to the achievement of a great religious organization than that it impregnated a few men with protests virile enough to save their fellows from satisfaction in failure. In that respect, successors of John Wesley have never been lacking in their service to the community.

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